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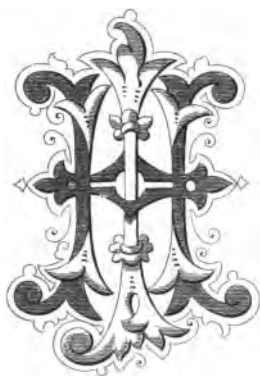
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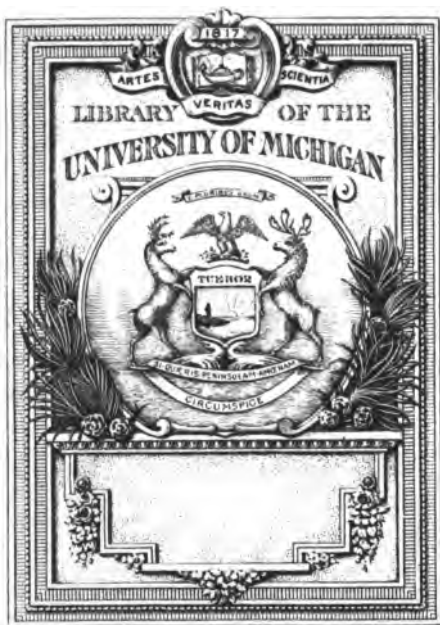
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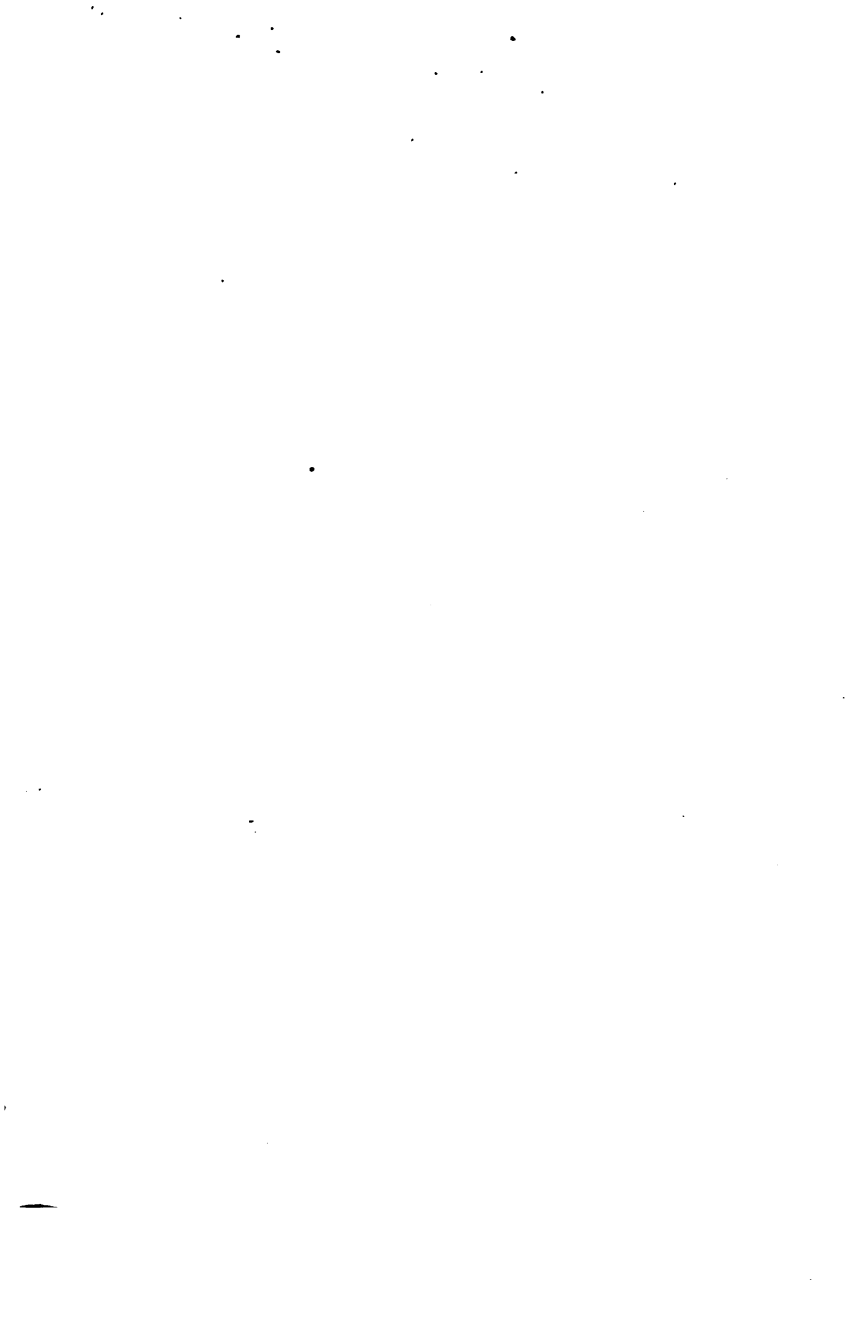




**GREEN PLEASURE**

**AND**

**GREY GRIEF.**



Hungerford, Mrs. Margaret Wolfe (Hamilton)

# GREEN PLEASURE AND GREY GRIEF.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'PHYLLIS,' 'MOLLY BAWN,' 'MRS GEOFFREY,' 'DORIS,' &c.

'These many years since we began to be,  
What have the gods done with us? What with me,  
What with my love? They have shown me fates and fears,  
Harsh springs, and fountains bitterer than the sea,  
Grief a fixed star, and joy a vane that veers,  
These many years.'

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# GREEN PLEASURE AND GREY GRIEF.

## CHAPTER I.

In vain men tell us time can alter  
Old loves or make old memories falter,  
That with the old year, the old year's life closes.  
The old dew still falls on the old sweet flowers,  
The old sun revives the new-fledged hours,  
The old summer rears the new-born roses.

SWINBURNE.

A DYING sunset, a sloping lawn, a rushing, tumbling stream, a clump of giant firs to the right, a suspicion of odorous garden sweets from the left, two forms in God's own likeness, and a roaring raging ocean down below—all seemed blended into one artistic whole, calm, almost motionless, save for the quarrelling of the turbulent river and the faint dashing of the waves against the rocks upon the barren coast.

Slowly the early summer sun is setting. Pale, with sad regret, he quits the lovely earth, and prepares to lay down his arms before night's queen. Already Dian's crescent marks the sky—faint yet, because so far away, but marching ever nearer, nearer, glad with the certainty of victory assured; the happy wind, that all day long has rioted in bower and 'pleasaunce faire' has gone to rest; a languorous stillness lies on all around; the air is heavy with the breath of drowsy flowers.

'Ah, this dear England!' says a young sweet voice, in a tone of quick delight. 'Though I have only known it for a little week, still it seems to me that it, and no other land, means home!'

The voice belongs to the prettiest lips in the world, the lips to the prettiest girl, a slender thing of about seventeen, with a

subtle charm about her difficult to describe, and with a face most sweet, most fair, made up 'of every creature's best ;' a clear broad brow, clear eyes are hers, and a tender loving mouth on which is writ in plainest print the gentle workings of the innocent soul within.

She is lying back in her garden-chair, with a white shawl thrown across her whiter gown. There is a little touch of languor about her idle hands and her entire pose, a something indefinite to fear in the excessive fairness of her roseleaf skin ; there is indeed a spirituality about her every glance and action, an eagerness, a brightness too great for her fragile frame. Her companion, a tall, aristocratic-looking woman of about forty-five, glances at her with some anxiety.

'I hope you will be happy here,' she says, with a little sigh.

'Happy ! Oh, that is nothing ! I am always happy. And what a sigh, auntie ; I believe you are still pining for your mosquitoes and your garlic.'

The elder woman smiles gently, and pats the small hand extended to her. That she is slave to the owner of that little hand one can see at the first glance. Though she is a stern-featured woman, with a face full of possible reservations and certain power, and the lines and marks of long years replete with unutterable grief, there are signs too upon it of natural tendencies bravely repressed, and of self-abnegation that has yet failed to embitter the strong, courageous spirit within. One firm to bear and swift to read and sure to comprehend, she sits here calmly with the girl's hand in hers, as though no bitterness from out the cruel past had blanched her soft dark hair.

'I wonder what our neighbours will be like,' says the young girl, vivaciously. 'Do you know any of them ?'

'Only by hearsay. Your grand-uncle, during his last illness in Florence, where, as you know, I went to attend him, used to speak of some of them at times, but only casually, and without interest. At Kingmore, which I take it must be about three miles from this, Sir George and Lady Bouverie live with their two sons, and somewhere close to them the Ponsonbys, of the Hollows ; but this is only guesswork. I hardly know where they live, or if they live at all.'

'Are the Ponsonbys a large family ?'

'No ; only father and daughter. Mr. Ponsonby is brother to Lady Bouverie, and comes of a good old family, but a poor one. He is a great scholar, I believe, but rather dreamy, and

a bookworm ; he reads with young men for the army, or something like that. You see I am a little obscure on all points.'

'I am glad he has a daughter, at least ; I have so seldom had girl friends. I wish, too, Lady Bouverie's family meant one son and one daughter ; don't you ?'

'I don't think so, my dear. Experience has taught me that young men are preferable to young women—one young woman'—fondly—'excepted.'

'Ah, that is because you are such a sad flirt !' says the young girl, gaily, at which they both laugh without reservation as at some very superior joke.

'Alas for one's secret sins ; they are sure to find one out !' murmurs the elder woman, lightly, running her fingers with a lingering fondness through the soft short rings of sunny hair that cover the pretty head so near to her.

A little laugh breaks from Dolores. She springs to her feet, and, throwing from her the shawl that has shielded her from the evening breeze, as though somewhat impatient of the care lavished upon her, runs eagerly to the garden on her left. Here flowers throng her path. Having made a delicate raid upon them, she returns again to her aunt's side and flings herself upon the grass at her feet. Her invasion of the summer garden has borne fruit. She now lies, with her head well thrown back against Miss Maturin's knee, admiring, with leisurely grace, the tall white lily in her hand, the sweet result of her assault.

'Tell me, auntie,' she says presently, lifting her eyes to the pale face above her, 'how long is it since my grand-uncle died ?'

'Just seventeen years.'

'Why, his death is as old as my birth !'

'Yes.'

As though a shadow from out the long buried past has come to her with the girl's words, Miss Maturin starts, and a quick frown falls upon her brow.

'Seventeen years !' says Dolores. 'What a long, long time ! And yet, though he left you this place, you never once came to see it. How unkind of you to hide its beauties from me until now ! Why did you not come home sooner, and bring me with you ?'

The shadow deepens on the elder woman's face.

'Perhaps I had a fancy for travelling,' she says, slowly.

'A lasting one, wasn't it? But I wonder you could keep away from this place, knowing it so beautiful.'

'I didn't know it; I never saw it until now.'

'Not when your uncle was alive?'

'There is nothing so wonderful in that. He was always abroad, and we had our own place up in the North.'

'As nice a home as this?'

'No. A bleak, cold, barren place—a hateful place! I never wish to see or hear of it again.' There is suppressed horror in her tone.

'Why? Did my mother die there?'

'No.' Miss Maturin, getting up somewhat abruptly, moves so as to stand behind Dolores's chair, and leans upon the back of it. 'Look at that dying sunset,' she says, quickly. 'Could anything be more lovely? Mark the clear streaks of orange and crimson, such straight pure bars, such——'

'It is as perfect as all this perfect scene; I feel I can never tire of it. But where did my mother die, auntie? Was it abroad?'

'Yes, abroad. Keep that shawl more closely round your chest, Dolores; there is often a chill in these summer winds. What a pretty little shawl it is! Where was it we bought it? Geneva, eh?'

'No, Lucerne. Have you forgotten? It was on just such an evening as this we saw—and fell in love with—it. But where abroad did my mother die, auntie? In France?'

'Yes, in France.' She looks round her a little helplessly, as if distressed. 'About your grand-uncle,' she says, rapidly; 'you were asking me about him just now, were you not? Such an eccentric old man as he was, but not altogether unlovable. He had his heart set on Italy, though why, none of us knew. He had no kin there, no friend, no love, and no special desire for art that I could see; yet he declined to be happy out of Florence. When dying, his greatest consolation was in the thought that his bones would lie there for ever.'

'I can understand him,' says the girl, dreamily. 'To lie for ever at rest in stately Florence would have its charm; but to me to die in such a land as this, near the waving corn and the scented flowers, with the cool night wind sighing above my grave, would be a greater happiness.'

'Better live in such a land,' says Miss Maturin, hastily. 'And is this an evening on which to talk of death or the grave?'



'You are right. Let us go back, then, to our original topic,' acquiesces the girl, gaily, with unconscious cruelty. 'Tell me about my mother. But come round here to me first, Lallie; I cannot see your face there.'

Miss Maturin, after a faint hesitation, going back to her seat, turns her face to her niece with a straight but rather forced gaze.

'Why not rather talk about our coming life here?' she says.

'To-morrow—any other time will do for that; but now I want to know something real of my mother. All you have yet told me is so little, so vague, so shadowy. But to-day, when we have come to her own land, the longing is strong upon me to know more of her. There must be something in the air to-night that compels me to think of her.'

'There is so little to tell,' says Miss Maturin. Her voice has changed its kindly ring, and now sounds constrained and harsh. 'A young life cut short in its nineteenth year—what should there be of any moment in it?'

'Tell me,' says the girl, leaning towards her, the soft wind roughening her pretty short hair as she moves, 'was her marriage a happy one? Was it,' leaning even closer to her, the better to watch her face, in glad expectation of her answer, 'a love-marriage?'

But no answer comes to her. A deadly silence seems to have enveloped Miss Maturin; it lasts for quite a minute—a long time, when two large grey eyes are watching one in puzzled surprise. At length, by a supreme effort, she breaks it.

'How can I tell?' she says, coldly. 'I was not with her at the time; I was in Italy with my uncle. You have surely forgotten!'

'But you saw her afterwards, when you took me, a little baby, from her arms?'

'From her dying arms, yes; but that was no time for confidences, or thoughts of worldly love.'

'No true love can be worldly,' says the girl, absently; then, with a playful little laugh, 'but that I know you would not dare do it,' she says, smoothing lightly the hand that lies in hers, 'I should say you were trying not to answer me.'

'Why should I do that?'

'I don't know—perhaps—why will you never speak of my mother to me, auntie? Is it—is it because you did not love her?'

'Perhaps it is because I loved her too well!' returns Miss Maturin, an ashen tint overspreading her face. She shrinks as she says it, and, stooping, presses upon the girl's slender fingers a tremulous caress. A sudden flood of colour springs into Dolores's cheeks, her lips quiver.

'Forgive me!' she whispers, slipping one arm round her aunt's neck. 'I was cruel to you! It hurts you, I can now see, to speak of her! How could I urge you so! Our dead are always so precious, and I——'

'It is nothing. Do not distress yourself about it. It is over already. But you are right, child,' with a visible effort, 'it does hurt me to speak of—your mother!'

'And my father?'—timidly.

'All are dead—all gone!' says Miss Maturin, in a clear, cold voice. 'Let us not bring them to life again. Let the past lie. The present only is our own; let us be content with it. Beloved child'—with sudden excitement—'think of the glorious sunset, the sky, the sea, the flowers, all that you tell me you love, but never of the years gone by!'

'Dearest, I will think of nothing that can cause you pain; and here, in this happy England, you will forget your early griefs—with me to love you. Is it not? You will stay here, auntie? You will not want to wander again?'

'I hope not'—very quietly; but some piercing thought disturbs the treacherous calm. 'I hope,' she says again suddenly, with vainly chidden passion, 'that nothing will ever happen to drive us from this place of refuge.'

'Why, auntie, how strangely you say that!' says the girl. 'What is it, then?'—softly, with the sweetest anxiety.

'Nothing, child! Nothing, my beloved one! But, when one has suffered much, one has doubts even in one's happiest hours.'

'Must all suffer?' asks Dolores, seriously, her eyes full of pitying wonder, not so much for herself, perhaps, as for the world at large.

'Nay, not all. Some are more fortunate than others—yet all must feel the knife. To some it is blunt, to some sharp and poisoned as a serpent's fang. Many have seemingly prosperous lives; but there is always death, my darling, the most prosperous cannot conquer that! Alas, what a bird of ill omen I am to my own bright bonny bird! But you would have me speak, and, after all, sweetheart, there is only one grief that can quite rend the heart in twain.'

‘And that?’

The beautiful childish lips are parted, the starry eyes are opened wide.

‘Is dishonour! But the very breath of it must not come nigh you. It cannot, it shall not, after all these years!’ she exclaims fiercely, but so low that her last words do not reach Dolores’s ears.

‘Dishonour? Ah, yes, that is what would touch one!’ she says, thoughtfully.

‘It shall not touch you.’

‘No, no, of course not; and yet’—slipping from her chair down upon her knees, and casting her pretty half-naked arms across Miss Maturin’s lap, ‘you speak’—glancing at her wistfully—‘as if it had come near you; and how could it, without touching me?’

‘I was but imagining a case. Tut, child!’—with a swift frown. ‘Must one never converse except of personalities? Once in a way perforce one wanders afield. And as for suffering of any sort—what has it got to do with you while your old aunt is here to protect you? Come, forget this idle conjecturing; let us rather think and plan for a happy morrow that shall be but the commencement of many happier ones.’

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## CHAPTER II.

I said—‘she must be swift and white  
And subtly warm, and half perverse,  
And sweet like sharp soft fruit to bite;  
And like a snake’s love, lithe and fierce.’  
Men have guessed worse.

SWINBURNE.

‘I THINK our new neighbours are likely to prove interesting,’ says Lady Bouverie, sweeping her black fan indolently to and fro.

‘That means they are either savages, or endued with rarer attributes than most,’ returns a young man, who is busying himself pulling the ears of a black-and-tan terrier; another young man, lounging against the open window, says nothing.

It is a sultry afternoon in mid-June—heavy, burdensome, because of its unbroken heat. The wind has forgotten the earth; the roses—its lovers—are drooping outside in the

garden ; the sunflowers, stately and grand in their long, stiff beds, are glowing and sighing in vain.

'Miss Maturin I thought cold in manner, but aristocratic in appearance,' goes on Lady Bouverie. 'She is of good blood beyond question, the Maturins of Egley, from whom they all come, being quite everything one could desire. They can count as many generations as the ordinary parvenu his years.'

'Can Miss Maturin count many years?' asks the young man with the terrier, half insolently.

'More than you can, certainly. She is about forty or forty-five I should say.'

'Alas and alack ! And is she the heiress ? Are all my fond hopes to be so cruelly dashed ? Is there no saving clause ? Is she the whole of our new neighbours ?'

'My dear Bruno, do let Fifa's ears alone ; I'm sure she can't like that incessant pulling ! No, there is a niece : such a pretty creature, all warmth and sunshine, the most extreme contrast to the aunt, who to me appeared really rather forbidding. It seems she—the niece—is the heiress, as she inherits all her aunt's property, which is considerable, both here and in the North. A charming girl I thought her.'

For an instant her eyes wander to her elder son, leaning idly half in, half out of the window, and apparently indifferent to the conversation. His indifference seems at this moment to cause her some annoyance ; she frowns slightly, and taps her foot upon the floor with unmistakable impatience. She is a tall woman of the bony type, with a cold, haughty expression, an eye like an eagle, and a Roman nose. Her lips are as thin as her sympathies, her eyes as colourless as her sentiments. Neither of her sons, except in height, in the least resembles her. They are both tall, well-knit young men, with sufficient good looks to command a second glance ; Bruno, the younger, being a shade darker than Dick, the elder, and perhaps a shade more companionable to the ordinary acquaintance.

'I will take your word for it all,' says Bruno. 'I feel she is the girl for me ! Warmth and sunshine and an heiress who is a beauty is as much as any reasonable fellow can expect. At all events, I shouldn't cavil at it.'

'I hope you intend to make a long stay in the country now, Richard,' says Lady Bouverie, turning to her eldest son and ignoring the frivolity of the younger. 'It is quite time you took some little interest in the estate. Your father, as you

know, is useless. His library'—with a sudden cold sneer—'is his kingdom. There he dreams away his life in imaginary worlds——

In mouldy novels fancy sees  
Aldines, Bodonis, Elzevirs.

He fancies there are priceless treasures on those dusty shelves of his.'

'“His mind to him a kingdom is,”' quotes Dick Bouverie, speaking for the first time. 'Happy is the man who can retain his fancies—however foolish—when old age has caught him! Let my father enjoy his books in peace!'

'It is your part to ensure him that enjoyment,' says Lady Bouverie, with ill-repressed sharpness. 'If you attend to the accounts, or at least overlook Watkins now and then, there is no reason why your father should not moulder away with his books, unmolested by words of mine. All servants require a master's eye upon them.'

'Have you got it, Dick?' asks Bruno laughing. 'Look at me till I see if I should quail before it. Very poor effect indeed! If I were you, I should grow one in my forehead; it would be far more imposing.'

'I thought you said you were going to the stables, Bruno?' says his mother, regarding him with some disfavour.

'No; I am going to stay here and listen to you. The people with whom Fifi and I love to associate seldom drop pearls of wisdom from their lips. Do they, Fifi?'—to the terrier, who barks a loud 'No,' and lifts a foreleg in anxious expectation of another word of recognition.

'I hate farming and Watkins and the country generally,' interposes Dick, with a gesture of dislike.

'Still, if your duty——'

'I hate that even more! What's the matter with Watkins? Why can't he go on alone in his management, as he has done for years?'

'There isn't anything the matter with him,' interrupts Bruno, 'beyond an oppressive smell of corduroy! He is quite well—no ailment of any sort, as far as I can see.'

'He grows decidedly careless and in many ways unsatisfactory,' says Lady Bouverie; 'he is, in fact, too old for his post. If I had my way, he should be dismissed at once, and a younger—a more competent man—put in his place.'

'But naturally you shrink from discharging one who has

served you faithfully for over twenty years,' says Bouverie, gravely, flicking a little speck of dust from his waistcoat.

A dull colour flames into his mother's cheeks. The latent antagonism that exists between her and her elder son springs into life at his words, and speaks through her angry eyes.

'You mistake me; I shrink at nothing!' she says haughtily.

'It seems a pity,' strikes in Bruno, judiciously, marking the signs of coming storm, 'that my many graces and speaking virtues should have induced my cousin, the admiral, to leave me that little place of mine, or I should have been delighted to give my talents to the overhauling of Watkins. I find him a very attractive old person, and rich in humour when I can understand him, which is seldom——'

'He can do nothing,' says Lady Bouverie, shortly.

'He can,—he can take snuff!' corrects her younger son, mildly. 'I'd back him against any one at that. You underestimate him, mother. You should at least'—reproachfully—'be just, and give the man his due.'

'I hope you mean to give up town this season,' says Lady Bouverie, addressing Dick. 'It is now six months since you have been at home; you should spare us a little of your time. It is'—coldly—'for your own interest alone I speak. If, at your father's death, you find things all at sixes and sevens, blame yourself, and remember I warned you.'

'Well, I'll think it over,' returns Bouverie, discontentedly. 'You relieve me, however, when you remind me that my carelessness will make myself only a sufferer. By-the-bye, I'm going down to the Hollows this afternoon. Any message for Audrey?'

'Say I shall be pleased if she will come up and dine with me to-night. I suppose it is only right I should show her some small civility at times,' says Lady Bouverie, with a half frown, 'although she and I are so totally dissimilar in every way that she perpetually jars upon me. How she can be my niece and still possess her objectionable ways is and always will be to me a mystery. She will expect me, of course, to ask her here a little, now you and Bruno are at home.'

'I shall give her your message,' says Dick, moving the rest of his body through the window on to the balcony without.

'As you will be passing Greylands,' says Lady Bouverie, regarding him calmly, and speaking with the constrained air of one who is following up an afterthought, 'I wish you would

call upon Miss Maturin, and tell her I shall send down to-morrow those pelargoniums she spoke of yesterday.'

'I shall remember,' returns Bouverie, as, with his usual idle stép, he goes down the stairs to the sward beneath.

'I'm rather glad that old place has got a mistress at last,' remarks Bruno, pleasantly, as he too rises to pay his long-deferred visit to the stables, or the kennel, or somewhere.

'Yes ; it is an advantage. It is too fine an old house to be let sink into decay, and moneyed people are always to be desired. We are not sufficiently rich ourselves to regard money with disdain, or, rather, to pretend to do so ; and Richard, when he marries, should think of——' She pauses abruptly. 'I hope he will not forget my message about those pelargoniums,' she concludes, with careful carelessness.

'And I hope he will deliver it to the charming niece ; don't you ?' supplements Bruno, innocently, as he strolls out of the room, Fifa at his heels.

Meantime, Dick, sauntering slowly over the fields to the Hollows, where his cousin lives, with a frown upon his brow and an impatient light in his dark blue eyes—a light that kindles there all too readily beneath his mother's touch—is thinking of many things.

It is growing towards evening, and now at last a faint breeze has uprisen, flying inland from the sea-cliffs, full of fresh and salty sweetness, to dance merrily among the swaying branches of the trees. It wakes the drowsy birds to sudden life, and thrush and lark and linnet have all come forth to unite in one grand evensong that thrills through wood and vale and bosky dell.

And in the close indomitable flowers,  
A keen-edged odour of the sun and showers  
Is as the smell of the fresh honeycomb  
Made sweet for mouths of none but paramours.

Upon the tennis-ground of the Hollows a girl is standing talking somewhat apathetically to a young man of the washed-out type. Seeing Bouverie advancing from under the limes, she says something to this polite nonentity that sends him racing, with all sails set, towards the house. She is a tall girl, with a pretty sweet figure, and a face that would be beyond reproach but for a certain touch of repressive pride and studied insolence—arising from education more than nature—that characterises it. The eyes, large and of a pure hazel, look at one out of a haze of haughty doubt ; the chin is

determined, the hair of a lustrous brown. Poverty, mingled with the traditions of three hundred generations, has raised this cloud upon a brow that should be possessed of contentment only.

Just now she is advancing towards Dick with a firm step and a prepared smile, and a little involuntary curl about her handsome lips.

'Ah, my dear cousin—you?' she says, coming slowly up to him, her tone genial, her expression belying her tone. 'Why it is quite six months, I think, since last we met! I hope absence has not lessened your love for me?'

Her voice is peculiar—clear, distinct, and soft, yet with an echo in it full of mockery that falls upon the heart when the words have passed away.

'No,' replies Bouverie, taking her proffered hand.

'Or increased it?' Here the mockery overrides the softness.

'No, since you demand the truth,' says Bouverie again, not uncivilly, but with an indifference that might well anger any woman.

'You are candour itself,' declares Miss Ponsonby, with a little laugh and a light shrug of her rounded shoulders. 'Let me emulate you by telling you what is on my mind. It is—what brought you?'

'A message from my mother principally.'

'To beg I will hold myself with greater dignity in church of a Sunday, and so set my father's pupils a worthy example?' asks she, with a little tremulous sneer. 'Or is it a hope that I have sought to cure myself of my reprehensible habit of using slang words, "unfit for any lady's use," and evidently contracted of the aforesaid pupils?'

'Neither of these advices have been entrusted to me,' says Bouverie, coldly. 'Why are you always so hard upon my mother?'

But, even as he says this in a rather lofty manner, he reminds himself that he too has been harbouring hard thoughts in his mind during his walk hither.

"I hate them that my vices tell me, and so do more of us (God wot) than I!" quotes the girl, with a little disdainful *moue*.

'Who were you talking to just now as I came up?' asks Bouverie, presently.

'Was I talking to anybody?'



'I certainly fancied so. I fancied too he went round that corner'—pointing to it—'as I came in sight.'

'What an excellent chaperon you would make, Dick!' says his cousin, with suspicious admiration. 'One feels positive regret that you should have so few opportunities of exercising your talent. You see,'—lifting her sombre eyes with a sudden flash to his—'*I can't employ you, your mother being more than enough for me. She keeps not only her own eyes, but the eyes of all the neighbourhood, upon my every action.*'

'Still, you haven't told me about your new friend,' persists Dick, unmoved. 'See—here he comes! Now,'—without lowering his voice—'may I know who he is?'

'Certainly. One of Dad's boys.'

At this 'one of Dad's boys' stops short, blushes, and looks ineffable things; but, as is his wont, says nothing.

'Ah,' says Bouverie, his eyes on the limp youth, who is uneasily shifting his lanky body from foot to foot beneath his steady gaze, 'that is an excellent introduction, no doubt; but I think I should like one a little more formal.'

'Too happy, I'm sure!' murmurs Dad's last boy in a milk-and-water tone, whilst trying to do impossible things with an eye-glass—a late purchase evidently, and dreadfully in the way.

'That is nonsense,' says Miss Ponsonby, sharply. 'No one was ever too happy. However, if it will make you a joyful man to know you once looked on Dick Bouverie, be joyful! Are you ready for your introduction, Dick? Sir Chicksy Chaucer—Mr. Bouverie. Feel any thrill of bliss, Sir Chicksy?'

'Could hardly help that, you know—so near you—able to see you, you know, and—er—that!' chirrup Sir Chicksy, with a feeble attempt at gallantry.

'You will be able to see me a great deal better if you drop that insane bit of glass,' says Miss Ponsonby, calmly. 'What on earth did you buy it for—eh? You have the best sight of any one I know.'

'Been long in the country, Sir Chicksy?' asks Bouverie, coming to the rescue; but Miss Ponsonby's last remark has overwhelmed Sir Chicksy and left him speechless.

'Oh, yes, a long time!' says his cousin, answering for her victim. 'Ever so long—years, I think! You came last February, didn't you, Sir Chicksy?'

'Last April—seems like yesterday to me,' sighs the smitten

baronet, with a reproachful glance at her. 'Very glad indeed to—er—make your cousin's acquaintance. Any'—with a rush—'cousin of yours—er——' Heavy fall.

'Any cousin?' says Miss Ponsonby. 'Will they all make you "too happy"? Why, you will be surfeited with gladness! Very good; I'll send word to the lot. By-the-bye, where is that racket I sent you for a moment since? No? Oh, it *must* be where I said it was!'

'It isn't, indeed. Give you my word; I searched for it high and low,' says Sir Chicksy, growing quite warm through fear of her increasing displeasure.

'Well, try the pantry. I know I had it in my hand yesterday, when I went there to speak to Mary.'

'I didn't know you had such an old boy as that on the premises,' says Dick, when Sir Chicksy has disappeared once more round the corner, with banners—that is, coat-tails—flying.

'That is because you have been so long away. You and Bruno so seldom visit your home that you give us time to quite forget you now and then.'

'Not quite, I hope,' protests Dick, politely but impolitely too—the want of interest in his face being only too apparent.

'Don't trouble yourself to make pretty speeches to me, Dick. I'll let you off,' returns she, with a slight shrug and a peculiar smile.

'Well, I hope Dad's new boy will prove a credit to him,' says Bouverie, with the air of one who is laboriously endeavouring to make conversation.

'Like Dad's old boy,' says a fresh voice coming from behind them, 'though misunderstood by all but "Dad" himself! What, you, Dick, old chap? What good wind has blown you hither?'

'A cab and a down-train,' replies Dick, turning with a friendly smile to the new-comer, a tall young man, of about thirty, with a square face, rather cynical lips, and chestnut hair.

'How d'ye do, Mr. Vyner, for the second time to-day,' says Miss Ponsonby, holding out to him her hand. It is a beautiful hand, as fair and as cool as a lily. Bouverie stares at her.

'I thought Vyner was always Anthony to you,' he says.

'So he was,' demurely. 'But of late'—mimicking her

aunt's formal tones to perfection—'I have striven to conquer that deplorable habit I had fallen into of calling young gentlemen by their Christian names.'

Both men smile.

'My mother sent you her love, and she hopes you will dine with her to-night,' says Bouverie.

'How sweet of her! Are you sure you have delivered your message correctly? Are you certain of the "love" part of it? I think I could do it better. "Tell Audrey that if she will care to dine with me to-night—which I greatly doubt, my society being scarcely calculated to suit her—I shall be pleased." Give her my love in return, however, and tell her I am sorry a severe and crushing headache will prevent my going to Kingmore this evening.'

'Oh, do come; you may as well!' says her cousin. 'Bruno is at home to-night; it won't be quite so slow for you.'

'Why?' asks Vyner, knocking the ash off his cigar. 'Is Bruno the one in favour now?'

'I confess to a weakness for Bruno,' says Audrey. 'But indeed,' lifting her dark eyes to his, 'you are all so high in my favour, I could not put one before the other. Still no, I shall not leave Dad to-night.'

'Happy Sir Chicksy!' murmurs Mr. Vyner, innocently.

'It was Dad I spoke of; but, if you will, yes. I shall stay here with him and Sir Chicksy,' says the girl, just a little defiantly.

'And a very nice entertaining boy he is to stay with,' returns Mr. Vyner, with suspicious cordiality. 'Having been frequently in his society of late, I may be considered qualified to speak. He is quite an antique in his way,—a bit of old English, like his name. By-the-bye, has he inherited any of the talent of his great namesake? Taken any rides to Canterbury—eh?'

'No,' says Miss Ponsonby, rather shortly. She has drawn herself up, and is looking at him with a slight frown on her low brow.

'Tastes are unaccountable, we all know,' remarks Bouverie, carelessly; 'yet I should have thought any girl would prefer Bruno to that callow youth I saw just now.'

'Remember how often you have told me I am unlike most girls; and to me Sir Chicksy at present is preferable. He is newer, and therefore better fun.'

'Isn't it hard to know any one?' says Mr. Vyner, with an

air of deep surprise. 'He doesn't look funny! Sad, I'd call it. Here he is, by Jove, and full of go, as usual!

'He comes, he comes, with his flashing eyes,  
And his cheek of passion's hue!'

This quotation is most unfortunately apt, as Sir Chicksy comes panting up to them breathless, and as rubicund as a peony.

'I've got it!' he says, waving the lost racket triumphantly above his head, and smiling broadly. 'Not such a bad messenger, after all, am I?'

'Bad! The very best!' says Miss Ponsonby, suddenly and most unexpectedly bestowing upon him one of her rare smiles. It carries Sir Chicksy into the seventh heaven, where he remains for a considerable time. Not that his goddess follows him there. She moves a little apart from the three men, and, stooping, picks up a ball or two lying near her on the tennis-court. As she bends and rights herself again, it is impossible not to mark the extreme grace and beauty of her lissome figure. She is dressed in a style slightly *bizarre*, but very pretty; and, though there is nothing about her costume to detract from the careful charm of it, still there is a something that suggests the idea that new gowns with her are few and far between.

Mr. Vyner's eyes, as she picks up the balls, follow her intently—not lovingly—simply curiously, and with that air of studying, of striving to master the secret workings of the hearts of those with whom he finds himself in contact that distinguishes him.

'That's a very pretty gown you've got on,' he says, presently, without enthusiasm, whereupon Sir Chicksy—who has been wildly, but vainly, endeavouring to float on a conversational sea with Bouverie—turns a murderous eye on him.

'I'm glad you like it,' says Audrey, indifferently; 'you will the less soon tire of it. As it is my latest, you are likely to see a good deal of it before it finds a worthy successor.'

As she makes this candid avowal, she laughs a little bitterly.

'"Long may it wave" then,' says Vyner, cheerfully.

'I must be off!' exclaims Bouverie, looking at his watch. 'You won't change your mind, Audrey, and come up to dinner, after all?' He says this earnestly.

'And so help you to get through a monotonous evening?'

returns the girl, carelessly throwing her balls into the air and catching them again. 'No,' with a shrug, 'I would do a few things for you, but not that.'

Bouverie laughs in spite of himself.

'You would have been a help, I confess,' he says, lightly. 'Will you come to the rescue, Vyner? Does the *mater* frighten you?'

'Your invitation comes too late,' says Mr. Vyner, with dignity. 'You offended me half an hour ago by ignoring my existence. Now I have made up my mind to dine with Dad and Sir Chicksy.'

'You can't indeed,' declares Miss Ponsonby, hurriedly, letting her balls reach the sward unheeded: 'it is quite impossible—quite!'

'Nothing is impossible! I'm all alone at Moorlands this evening; and, as you well know, I can't endure my own society. It is useless your regarding me with that forbidding frown, Miss Ponsonby, because I won't take a denial. I shall appeal to Dad himself if you refuse me a hearing, and he will certainly treat me as I deserve.'

'You cannot dine to-night!' says Audrey, with emphasis. 'For one thing,' colouring warmly all through her pale clear skin, 'there is only cold mutton for dinner.'

'Is it a loin?' unmoved.

'Yes,' unwillingly.

'Then I shall stay. If there is one thing for which I have a settled hankering, it is a loin of mutton cold; besides,' lowering his voice, 'you have so whetted my curiosity about Sir Chicksy—described him in such glowing colours as a wit and all that—that I am bent on improving his acquaintance.'

'You are bent on nothing of the kind!' angrily.

'I am indeed. Do you think, if I ask him to Moorlands for the grouse, he will promise not to shoot himself? I may come to dinner, may I not?'

'Oh, you can come if you like!' returns she, ungraciously.

'Then I must go home disconsolate,' says Dick, 'and listen all through dinner to diatribes against the servants, uttered before their faces, an ordeal greater than which I know not one. Good-bye, Audrey; I hope this cruelty will be forgiven you! By-the-bye, you won't refuse to come to us on the nineteenth, at least, will you?'

'To Aunt Maria's dance?'

'Yes. It ought to be a success! My mother, poor soul,

has taken such pains about it, though why she can't go to town in the season, and give her "At homes" in a rational manner, I can't conceive.'

'I shall be at her irrational one, at all events. The duchess is to be there, is she not? And I quite long to find myself for once face to face with a real live "big D." My acquaintance with them up to this has been confined to that charming lady in "Alice in Wonderland" who dandled a pig.'

'I'm glad you'll come,' says Dick, 'though I won't swear you will enjoy yourself. My mother believes herself irresistible; but I hardly know any one so universally unpopular. Is it her misfortune or her fault?'

He is talking now exclusively to Audrey, Mr. Vyner having engaged himself in a desperate argument, hopeless of termination, with the terrified Sir Chicksy.

'Far be it from me to decide so delicate a point,' says Miss Ponsonby, with lowered lids, and an untranslatable smile. 'Good evening, Dick, if you must go so soon. You leave at least one regret behind you.'

'And that is?'

'That you cannot induce Mr. Vyner to accompany you.'

'Very poor, very poor indeed!' says Mr. Vyner, with open contempt. 'It would take thrice that to make me forego the cold loin and—Sir Chicksy.'

'Oh, I knew the hint would be useless!' retorts Miss Ponsonby, with a contemptuous gesture.

'Well, good-bye again, sweet coz,' says Dick, lightly. 'I am off to fulfil a second mission. Let us hope I shall be more successful in that than in my first.'

'The gods grant it,' says Audrey, piously.

'Where are you going, Dick?' asks Vyner.

'To "Castle Dangerous"—that is, to Greylands, where Venus embodied lives, as I hear.'

'Ah! To see Miss Lorne! Well, you won't be disappointed; she is as lovely as a dream! I saw her yesterday.'

'A good reason for seeing her again to-day. Walk so far with me, Anthony.'

'Can't, my dear boy. Must stay here, as I told you already, to pick up Miss Ponsonby's balls and such sparks of wisdom as fall from the erudite lips of Sir Chicksy. Cultivate the talented at all risks, that is an undeviating rule with me.'

'Till we meet again, then!' says Bouverie, fading swiftly out of sight.

## CHAPTER III.

From the depths of the green garden-closes,  
Where the summer in darkness dozes,

\* \* \* \* \*

How red was the reign of the roses  
Over the rose-crowned land !

SWINBURNE.

A SHORT walk across the sunny meadows brings him to the gates of the Hollows.

'Beastly bore my mother's insisting on my taking a message here, to people of whom I know nothing, nor wish to know,' he mutters to himself, as he stands outside the gate, hesitating about demanding an admittance.

'Freshly painted, by Jove,' he says, regarding the decent gate with scorn, 'and the grass gone from the avenue! What a difference a brush and a scraper can accomplish! I'd hardly know the old place now. What a number of years it is since I went through this gate! Never since old Jasper's time, and never then, I think. A short cut through the high grass and the hanging branches was more in my line at ten! Let's see if I could feel like ten now, and if that side-wood'—with a half laugh—'and that rustic gate leading into the garden, still sniff of paradise.'

Turning aside from the principal entrance, he follows the road a little higher up until he comes to a wooden stile; springing over this, he finds himself knee-deep in scented clover, with a vision of leafy shade beyond. Reaching the wooded hollow on the left, he plunges into its mystic recesses with a faint, faint return of the old boyish delight in its glories that once held him captive, and even now awakens a thrill of keenest pleasure in his breast. Short-lived, however; years and the world's scorching touch have killed the freshness that could once find joy prolonged in the secrets of mysterious Nature.

Even as the perfumed branches press down to bar his path, and myriad forest-flowers cry out for notice in the gathering twilight, his mind reverts with an angry impatience to his mother's last hints and innuendoes.

To ask a fellow to spend his entire summer buried alive in

a hole of a place like this ! Could there be anything more unreasonable ? But women and reason were two ! That he had known to his cost for many a day, be the woman mother, or cousin, or——

He had told himself before leaving town that he was doing quite the part of the model son in acceding to her request that he would be present at her dance on the nineteenth, given in honour of the duchess, who was a sort of thirty-first cousin of his father. The duchess, for some inscrutable reason, had elected to go down to her place in Blankshire, about ten miles from Kingmore, at this unholy time, missing her season point-blank, to the astonishment of all her friends. He had indeed felt he had done a good deal in the filial line when he too had gone down to Blankshire, meaning to stay a week or ten days at the outside, and now he finds himself let in for a visit extending over an indefinite period. And what the deuce does he know of accounts, or Watkins—or——

There is that dinner at Richmond to which he is almost bound. And, *autres mœurs*, that dance at Lady Millefleur's ; and the time running short now ! Well, a week of accounts ought to mean a good many figures, and this is only the fourteenth, and the last week of June and first of July are never half so bad—and—and—of course 'duty' is a beastly word, especially when thrust upon one in that uncompromising fashion ; but with a sigh he acknowledges this, it means something in the long run ; and a man if he wants to keep straight at all, must have some chart by which to steer.

These glimpses into a profound morality bring him to a small rustic gate studded with iron nails, sunk in a high wall. There are two steps leading up to it, and, as he mounts them and pushes it open, one can see that still six more steps must be ascended before the garden beyond is reached. Closing the small gate gently behind him, Bouverie, with a relapse into his former dreamy state—born of the old happy days when he was a boy, and their memories—springs lightly up the inner steps, and, looking straight before him, sees not ten paces from him something that dispels all boyish visions, something most sweet, most fair, and rich in grace and beauty.

A little rose-red hammock swung by silken ropes, a childish form lost in lazy tranquil slumber, with, upon its bosom, a great cluster of pale blossoms that rise and fall with the coming and going of the breath that stirs the heart beneath, a sense of pure blue sky that falls through the netted tangle of



the branches overhead, a singing of many birds, the fond murmur of a distant stream, and, over and through all these, the rush of a satin wind, laden heavy with the perfume of the innumerable roses that throng this enchanted corner of our lovely world.

Lightly, too, this scented wind is rocking to and fro the crimson bed ; but still its little, pale, fair occupant unconscious lies. Bouverie seeing this, his latest, sweetest vision, moveth not, draws nearer, nearer still, until he is gazing down upon the sleeping marvel, so strangely found. Her long dark lashes lie motionless upon her cheek, flushed delicately, her lips are slightly parted ; one arm, half bare, is flung above the shapely head, the other lies languidly, lost in part among the scattered flowers upon her breast, the slender fingers still sleepily clutching the rosebuds they had been holding when consciousness departed.

So pure, so fragile seems the sudden vision that Bouverie, afraid to stir lest the faintest sound should drive it from him for ever, stands mute before it wondering. There is a calm beauty about the tranquil face that fascinates him. Unbidden comes to him the thought—

That, as of light the summer sunnë sheen,  
Passeth the star, right so over measure,  
She fairer is than any creature.

Then, all in a moment, as he stands spellbound, fearing to withdraw, lest he disturb her, yet doubting his right to stand here and admire without let, or hindrance, or permission, so fair a thing, the soft white lids uprise, and two eyes, 'sweetest eyes were ever seen,' look calmly into his. Vaguely they look at first, and in nowise coldly, he being as yet but a fragment of the wild dream she has just left ; then, with wide lids and growing knowledge, she stares at him, and, rising on her dainty elbow, lets amazement have full sway, and something else too, that might perhaps be termed indignant wrath in one with lips and eyes less sweet.

'How did you come here ?' she asks, in a low clear voice ; there is surprise largely mingled with the grave displeasure in her face.

'By this gate,' says Dick Bouverie, quailing beneath the severity of those searching eyes. 'I used to come into the garden by it long ago when I was a little fellow in your—your fa—your uncle's time. I forgot I was trespassing.'

There is abject humility in his tone and expression ; but the lady of the hammock refuses to be softened.

'This is my own garden ; no one comes here without my permission,' she says, austere.

'I—I might have asked for permission certainly,' says Dick, vaguely ; but I didn't know. I——'

'It would have been of no use ; I wish to be alone here always !' she says, with distinct meaning. 'But the mistake is in part my own, of course ; yet I was quite sure I had turned the key in the lock.'

'No, there was no key at all,' says Dick. 'But, of course, that is nothing. I should not have come here ; I should have remembered I could not come in and out now as I used when I was a boy.'

'Was everybody in this neighbourhood in the habit of coming here when you were a boy ?' demands she, increasing anger in her eyes.

'Oh, no ! And some of us were girls then,' says Dick, demurely, but without daring to smile.

She regards him fixedly for a full minute, as though haughtily suspecting him of undue levity, and then, with a sudden light movement, springs to the ground.

'I am Dolores Lorne !' she says, standing erect before him, with her pretty head updrawn, as though to let him see who is mistress in this territory.

Dolores ! What a sad little name ! With a pang—even in this early moment of their acquaintance it is with a distinct pang—he feels that in some vague indefinite fashion the name suits her.

'And I am Dick Bouverie,' returns he, 'and very, very sorry I disturbed you.'

'I believe that. And now,' coldly, 'you can go if you like.'

'I don't like. I can't bear to go away without your forgiveness,' says Dick, with such an amount of earnestness in eyes and voice as verifies his words and speaks for the depth of his contrition.

'Oh, well you may have that !' she says, looking down. 'And then—if—if your name is—Dick Bouverie, I suppose it was your mother who called here yesterday ?'

'Did she call ?' says Dick, who knows well she did, but, through very longing to hear again the low *trainant* voice, pretends ignorance. And why had she brought up this question about his mother ? Perhaps to soften the cruelty of her

dismissal, perhaps—oh, goodly thought!—to do away with the dismissal altogether!

‘I think it must have been your mother,’ says Dolores, reflectively, tapping her red lips with her forefinger in meditative fashion. ‘A tall woman—very tall, with—I mean—that is’—quick confusion covering her as she thinks of what she had so nearly said—‘I mean a very tall woman!’

This is distinctly lame.

‘Your description is perfect—a very tall woman, with an enormous nose,’ says Mr. Bouverie, sublime gravity marking every feature.

At this she grows red, and glances at him shyly from under her curling lashes, and looks down again, and up again, and finally they both burst out laughing. Laughter at their age is a quick road to friendship; but Dolores is not as yet prepared to hold out the right hand of fellowship. She checks her merriment, and stands back from him a little step or two, and clasps her hands behind her.

‘I think you had better come in and see auntie,’ she says, with increased dignity, ‘that is, if indeed you meant to pay her a visit this evening,’ glancing at him suspiciously.

‘Certainly I meant it. I came here purposely to see her, with a message from my mother about pelargoniums.’

‘What about them?’

‘Well, that’s just it, you see,’ says Dick, with a confiding smile. ‘I haven’t the faintest idea. I assure you I knew all about it the very moment before—before I entered this garden; but it is all gone out of my head now. Was she to offer your aunt some, or was your aunt to give her some? She told me she had called, and—’

‘I thought,’ turning large convicting eyes upon him, ‘you said just now—or at least you gave me the impression—that you did not know your mother had been here at all?’

‘Did I? You see—there it is again! I’ve got such a wretched memory,’ says Dick, mournfully. ‘At least I have now, I hadn’t this morning! It must be something in the air of your garden.’

‘Don’t scold my garden! It has the sweetest air on earth,’ says Dolores, with decision; ‘and see—there is auntie standing in the window. Come to her.’

With all the demeanour of one escorting a condemned felon to the gibbet, she leads him towards that open window of the drawing-room, where a tall dark figure can be descried looking

in their direction. A few stone steps lead from the terrace to the verandah, and up these perforce Mr. Bouverie follows his captor.

'I have brought you a trespasser, auntie,' says this last awful personage, slipping her hand through Miss Maturin's arm and confronting Dick with a menacing air. 'I found him in my own grounds, without permission, and——'

'I think it was I found you,' interposes Mr. Bouverie, mildly. But his weak attempt at defence is treated with contempt.

'He could give no proper account of himself,' says his gaoler, sternly, 'so I have brought him to you, to do with him as seemeth good in thine eyes.'

'Don't be hard on me, Miss Maturin,' says Dick, advancing. 'I have been so browbeaten and generally frowned down already that I have little resistance left in me. I can just barely remember that my name is Bouverie; but beyond that—my mind is a blank.'

'Nay, then, I think you have been punished enough,' says Miss Maturin, smiling. 'Come in, and let us begin our acquaintance under more auspicious circumstances.'

'That means under the shadow of the tea-tray,' says Miss Lorne, saucily, turning upon Dick a sudden bright smile that puts formality and unfriendliness to flight at once and for ever.

It is a very pretty room they enter, smelling sweetly of gay Indian mattings. Quaint tables and chairs are scattered broadcast, and Persian rugs of divers colours lie here and there. There are two large Sèvres bowls filled with roses, cream and white and yellow, and a few red, a still fewer blue monsters standing on carved cabinets, with gaping jaws and goggle eyes; some Nankin china; some hideous Hindu idols, a few choice modern water-colours on the painted walls, and a good many Eastern and European gimcracks of one sort or another, mixed up in a charming confusion all over the place.

'And where did you find Dolores?' asks Miss Maturin presently, when she has found out that he does like sugar and is very fond of cream. But he is not allowed to answer.

'In my own garden—my sanctuary,' says the mistress of that sacred spot. 'I was in my hammock, breathing the air of heaven, and lost in dreams'—with a little quaint dramatic action of her hand—'when he came to me.'

'I'm glad of that—glad that you found her resting, I mean,' says Miss Maturin, tenderly. 'She runs about too

much, Mr. Bouverie ; she over-exerts herself. For one moment in the day she will not be still. I have had that hammock put up on purpose for her, that she might take a little rest now and then.'

'Miss Lorne is not without rest to-day, at least,' says Dick. 'I found her sound asleep in that self-same hammock.'

'Asleep! In the open air! Oh, Dolores, I hope not!' says her aunt, with quick dismay. 'You know how delicate your chest is, and to sleep in the open air! Dear child, how careless of you!'

'It was but for a little moment'—penitently—'and indeed I don't know how it happened; but I was lying there blinking at the hot sun as he glanced at me through the rustling leaves, and somehow I lost myself in a day-dream, and a little lulling wind came to me across the roses, and then I knew nothing more until my day-dream became a real one. A short one, though, because some kindly fairy whispered to me that an ogre had entered my land; and so I awoke.'

'An ogre! Alas, Miss Lorne! Have I deserved all this?'

'Well,' with sweet relenting, 'I will confess to you I was going to say a prince; but I didn't think'—mischievously—'you deserved all that!'

'If Mr. Bouverie was the one to release you from that treacherous slumber—so sure to give you cold—I, for one, not only forgive him his trespass, but thank him sincerely for his well-timed arrival,' says Miss Maturin.

'After all, I believe I am grateful to him too,' declares Dolores, lightly. 'My dream was of an evil thing, and I was glad to be rescued from it. Was I,' turning to Bouverie, 'frowning when you saw me first, as though frightened—or——'

'No; on the contrary, you seemed to be enjoying the sleep of the just.'

'I should have looked distressed, I think; I felt it. How,' with childish curiosity, 'did I look then?'

'As though you dreamt of heaven,' says Bouverie, with such grave and sudden earnestness that it almost seems as if the words come from him without volition on his part. Dolores, as though startled, turns her eyes to his; something she sees there shortens her gaze, and the faintest tinge of crimson creeps beneath the cream white of her skin. Her long lashes flicker shyly, and then her eyes droop.

She stood, and hung her visage down a-low.

Bouverie, angry with himself in a vague manner about something he barely understands, looks out of the window upon the fast-falling twilight that is dusking all the land and casting a grey mantle over the pale ocean down below.

Meanwhile, Miss Maturin—who has seen nothing—is talking to a ‘disgracefully absent audience.’

‘That is where your dreams should come from,’ she is saying, pleasantly, her heart in her words, her eyes on the cream-ewer. ‘All a pretty maiden’s dreams should come straight from the skies.’

‘Mine came from some other place,’ says Dolores, whose faint troubled thought has vanished. ‘It was a cruel vision, so slight, so shadowy, I could not grasp or put it into words even if I would; but still I know it was framed by Evil.’

‘Tut, you silly child! What should you have to do with such a word? It should be unknown to you,’ says Miss Maturin, fondly. ‘Dreams are but reproductions of our thoughts and actions in one form or another. They are shaped obscurely from our surroundings. Now, from what corner of your life could you call forth a troubled recollection?’

‘And yet it oppressed me,’ says the girl, dreamily. ‘I seemed,’ slowly putting out one hand, ‘going—going—parting from all I loved—sinking into—— No, I cannot recall it—I will not’—with a quick shudder—‘yet I know it prophesied trouble. And—your own words, auntie,’ with a swift glance at her—‘we must all know that, must we not?’

‘Not all,’ says Bouverie, impulsively; yet, as he says it, a cold wave seems to rush across his heart. Does there in the mysterious future live a day when he shall see those soft, clear eyes dull with grief’s knowledge—those warm, red lips pale and cold, the whole fair, lovely face haggard with a torment that knows no hope?

‘Yes—all,’ says Dolores, slowly. ‘Ask auntie.’

‘No, no!’ murmurs Miss Maturin, nervously.

‘There is no rule without an exception,’ declares Dick, gaily. ‘Let you’—to Dolores—‘be the brilliant one.’ He laughs; but to any one intimate with him it would be known that his gaiety costs him an effort. ‘My mother, for example, is another. She has had an uncommon good life, taking it altogether; trouble and she, so far, have been anything but friends.’

‘Then her time is yet to come—as is mine,’ persists Dolores, with a smile that half kills the fatality of her words.

'If you get through as much of your life as my mother has of hers without coming to grief, you won't have much to complain of,' retorts Bouverie, with a persistence almost as keen as her own.

'Yet she cannot escape altogether, if there be justice meted out,' says the girl, shaking her head prophetically; 'and in truth I do not deem her so entirely fortunate. For myself, I should wish my miseries, if they are to be, to come early, so as to have them over before night descended. Of your grace'—glancing at Bouverie, with a soft laugh—'pray that for me. The worst evil, to my thinking, that could befall me would be to find myself in my old age—if indeed, which may not be, that old age be mine—cut off from hope and gladness and content. Let sorrow, if it is to be, come to me now, when I am young and strong to bear.'

'What are you saying, Dolores?' exclaims Miss Maturin, rising suddenly from the tiny spindle-legged table on which the tea-tray is set. 'What have you got to do with sorrow, or pain, or death? Forget such things, and think only of the sun, the flowers, and your friends the singing-birds! Do not tempt Fate to shower upon you his worst gifts.'

'That hammock is badly slung. I am sure of it,' says Bouverie, lightly. 'If Miss Lorne is unlike herself to-day, I am, of course'—hesitating—'too new an *acquaintance* to mark a difference in her; but, if——'

'Nay, say what you first intended,' interrupts Miss Maturin, giving him one of her kindest smiles. 'A friend, I hope you will be to us.'

'A certainty leaves no room for hope,' returns he gracefully.

There is to him an irrepressible charm in the calm, slow tones and kindly glances of the elder woman—a sense of rest too, and a knowledge of sure help in time of need, in the quiet power of her dark, handsome face.

'At what shrine did you learn your courtly phrases?' asks Dolores, with a would-be scornful glance. All clouds have vanished from her face; she is again the gay, happy, debonair child of a moment since.

'You are a saucy baby!' says Miss Maturin, lovingly. 'Do not heed her, Mr. Bouverie; but if you have still half an hour or so to spare us, fill your pockets with those biscuits there, and come with us to feed our swans.'

## CHAPTER IV.

Of all things tired thy lips look weariest.

SWINBURNE.

Out of the garish day into the cool sweet night, clad with its myriad stars! The windows are all thrown wide, and from within the sound of the plaintive fiddling creeps through them to mingle with the many harmonies that thrill the heart of Nature in the dark depths of the sleeping garden—the rush of tumbling streams, the faint drip of lazy fountains, the sad music of the distant lap-lapping of the waves upon the lonely shore.

Coloured lamps are shedding pale tints of red and yellow upon the indecorous limbs of the gods and goddesses who are gleaming snow-white in the moonlight that riots in glade and bower and dell.

It is the evening of the nineteenth, and the rooms at Kingmore are filled to overflowing; so are the staircases, so are the flower-decked antechambers and the scented conservatories. The duchess, who is in an exceptionally gracious mood and quite on her best behaviour—her eldest girl having consented to throw away her youth upon a modern if mouldy Cæsus—has arrived early, and is now making herself charming to every one she knows; and indeed, without meaning it, to many she doesn't, her glasses being but a snare to her and her memory for her country acquaintances but short.

She is dressed in a mustard-coloured gown and a most remarkable—but doubtless 'distinctly precious'—head-gear of daffodils, the originals of which assuredly never grew either in earth or heaven. She is a huge woman, with a not unpleasant face, and quite casts Lady Bouverie, beside whom she is standing, into shade by right of her superior proportions.

'I can't bear those divided skirts!' she is saying, with great acrimony, directing a severe gaze at a distant corner of the room, where a young woman who has found herself unexpectedly alone in her 'short division' is wishing herself dead. 'The princess is especially hard on them. But see there,' waving her fan towards the doorway, 'who is that just entering? A charming face—charming!'

The owner of the charming face, advancing somewhat



haughtily up the room, murmurs some cold word or two to Lady Bouverie and then moves on.

'What grace, what finish!' says the duchess, admiringly, whose own daughters have a fatal tendency towards hoydenism. 'She is ——'

'My niece,' says Lady Bouverie, coldly—'Audrey Ponsonby. You know her father,—my brother—I think; but you are so seldom at home that I dare say you never saw her before.'

'Well, I think not. I shouldn't have forgotten her if I had,' says the duchess, pleasantly. 'You are fortunate in possessing so desirable a niece; she must be like a daughter to you.'

'I am quite content with my sons. I have no desire for a daughter, and in no case should I covet Audrey,' replies Lady Bouverie, stiffly.

'Ah,' her Grace nods slowly, 'I have often heard that hazel-eyed people are never very comfortable! But she has a face that would do for Kate Hardcastle very nicely, or even for Lydia Languish.'

She falls a-musing after this curious speech, and follows Audrey's departing figure with thoughtful eyes.

'I fear indeed she is more stagey than dignified,' says Lady Bouverie, with a subdued sneer.

To her the girl is utterly distasteful. There is a certain sense of insolence in the very droop of Audrey's lashes, and unexpressed yet open determination to revolt at any moment against the would-be authority of her aunt, that is known to Lady Bouverie, and galls her at times more than she would care to acknowledge even to herself. An indomitable will, matched against another more indomitable still, breeds ill-will; and Lady Bouverie, accustomed to carry all before her on her own ground, takes it badly that this motherless chit of a girl—as poor as she is fractious—should decline to lay down her arms before her. Her poverty is in itself a crime, because it is a poverty that rubs itself persistently against Lady Bouverie and claims kinship with her. Unkind fortune had made this girl's father her brother; and to have almost at one's gates a brother compelled to educate boys and young men as a means towards gaining his daily bread is as a thorn in the flesh of her whom chance has lifted beyond such sordid considerations as the possible non-payment of one's butcher or baker, or the consequences to follow on the spending of a shilling more or less.

Had Providence so ordered it that Mr. Ponsonby's lines had been laid in places far remote from Deadmarsh, Lady Bouverie would have felt devoutly grateful to Providence, and would have submitted to its will with an unmurmuring resignation ; but Providence so far had forgotten to humour her prejudices, and Mr. Ponsonby ground Greek and Latin and conic sections into the ears of his pupils within a mile or so of the sacred precincts of Kingmore.

Lady Bouverie would gladly have forgotten all those early beggarly days when she too had struggled with an insufficient income, and had to think many times before permitting herself the extravagance of a new gown. These were days in which Sir George—then only Mr. Bouverie and a second son, and by no means weighed down with wealth—had been considered as a blessed chance of escape from the petty worries of a straitened household ; but now—well, now she is Lady Bouverie by a fortuitous accident, and even to be reminded of that moneyless unpleasant past is hateful to her. She had, by her own exertions and the aid of Sir George—to his everlasting regret be it said—lifted herself from her depressing surroundings to a very much higher estate ; and now to be reminded of them daily by this insolent girl and her gentle but scarcely less aggravating father is bitter indeed to the ambitious woman. With eyes askance she has gone through life glancing at Audrey, the girl's independent ways and scornful determination to reject all patronage having angered the older woman past forgiveness. Indeed, Audrey's dislike to her aunt has spread as far as her aunt's sons ; and though to Bruno she grants a half-hearted friendship, she is in spirit unjust to Dick. Between her and him there is ever a smouldering feud likely to burst into flame at any moment.

Thus unsupported by those who should be her natural protectors, Audrey's strange repellent ways have gained her few friends in the neighbourhood. Life in Deadmarsh—as this part of the country is called—is not easy to the pretty, or to those imbued with that lightest art of nature named coquetry. One must hardly dare here to enjoy oneself without reserve. Laughter must be subdued, originality of speech or thought suppressed, marked action eschewed. To be good is to be decorously dull ; there must be no consenting to idle admiration from the opposite sex—no flaunting of the obnoxious fact that this one can command attention where other people's daughters cannot.

There is no place like a small country circle for utter

tyranny of this sort ; where a narrowed society lives in a religion of its own and looks upon all outside the pale of its paltry convictions as among those who have gone over to false gods—pariahs of the lowest order—scarce fit to be the possessors of a soul ! The divine liberality, that travel and a healthful knowledge of our sad world brings, is rare in the orthodox countryside. Running (if not too fast) is not forbidden, but it must be in the groove wherein all others run. To dig out a path for oneself is to call down condemnation on one's head.

Miss Ponsonby, now and then preferring a pathway of her own, is regarded with great disfavour by her neighbours, and indeed it cannot be said that she has in any way sought to propitiate their ill-will, certain caustic words of hers that have been banded from mouth to mouth having scarcely tended to enhance her popularity. There was, for instance, that saucily veiled hint about Mrs. Drummond's father, who had had undoubtedly a good deal to do with sugar. 'Sweets to the sweet,' said Audrey to Mrs. Drummond's bosom friend the vicar's wife, speaking directly of Mrs. Drummond, with a broader word or two still here and there that left no doubt on the hearer's mind that sugar was the 'sweet' more particularly meant. The vicar's wife, Mrs. Dovedale, being of a communicative turn of mind, and herself of unexceptionable birth—her father a fourth baronet—had, with much unction and uplifting of brows and the greatest delicacy and hesitation, retailed to her friend all that Audrey had said, and a little more ; whereon dire hatred for Audrey had sprung to life in Mrs. Drummond's breast. There had been other things said by Audrey too that had come home to those who should not have heard them, with additions that a rolling stone will always gather.

More especially to the matrons, mothers of unmarried girls, is Audrey a *bête noire*. Ugly girls, silent girls, silly girls, who line the walls in pathetic loneliness whilst she dances, or sit in hopeless isolation over dull albums after duller dinners, watching Audrey with sullen envy where in some distant part of the room she is commanding the homage of half a dozen men, each one of whom would think himself doubly fortunate if by that indescribable movement of the hand, which pretty women know, she should draw her skirts aside and permit him the uncomfortable edge of the ottoman on which she may be seated. For those great lambent hazel eyes, half insolent, half satiric, have a power to charm the ungentler sex that lesser, milder beauties lack.

'Is there any hope that I may get a dance from you to-night?' asks Mr. Vyner, emerging from a curtained recess as Audrey passes by on the arm of a young and, let us hope, gallant Plunger.

For an instant she hesitates; then—

'You can have the next,' she says, slowly, a half tone of unwillingness in the sweet petulance of her voice.

'The next is a quadrille. Do you call that a dance?'

'No? Better not have it, then.'

"Half a loaf," suggests he, cheerfully. 'Yes, I will have it, though I must consider it the shabbiest bit of dough. Hark to the opening bars! Let us fly from them.'

She lays her hand mechanically upon his arm, lets a stray indifferent smile wander towards the obliterated Plunger that alights somewhere upon his coat, and finally finds herself in a cool retreat on a velvet lounge, with Mr. Vyner beside her.

'You were early to-night,' he says, as an introductory opening to the coming *tête-à-tête*.

Few people like to be told they have arrived early at any gathering; but Miss Ponsonby, if this remark annoys her, makes no sign.

'I meant to be late,' she answers, absently; 'but Sir Chicksy was dreadfully in earnest. He is young, you see. A dance is still something to him.'

'A dance with you, I dare say.'

'Then Dad was fidgety, too. He is always in such excellent time himself'—with a short laugh—'that he naturally likes to see others up to the mark as well.'

'Have I lived to hear you sneer at Dad?' asks Vyner, with an assumption of tragic astonishment.

A moment later he is sorry for his words. The girl flushes a painful crimson, and for an instant the proud lips quiver.

'Sneer at Dad!' she says, with angry haste. 'What do you mean?'

'I beg your pardon,' says Vyner.

'Never say that to me again,' exclaims she, with a flash from her handsome eyes. 'Do you hear? You are the last who should say it or think it.' Then her sudden grief or passion, whichever it was, dies away, and her face grows even paler than before. 'How charming Mrs. Wemyss is looking to-night!' she says, with such calm every-day carelessness as startles him after her late burst of vehemence.

'That might be said of half a dozen people—of you, for example ; it is no great thing to say.'

'Her costume at least is beyond reproach.'

'Is it? A little pronounced, perhaps ; but of course widows can allow themselves a good deal of license. For my own part, I prefer yours.'

'Mine !' She glances down at her dress and smiles contemptuously. 'Why, this gown is an heirloom !' she says, with a faintly bitter smile. 'All the county knows it by this time. No,' quickly, as though fearing or guessing some thought of his, 'Dad would give me another—twenty others if he could ; but he can't simply. We are savages, he and I ; we live upon the boys, and even they scarcely suffice us. I don't know why I tell you all this ; you knew it so well before ; you should, having been a boy of Dad's yourself once.'

'And a very grateful boy, too, for a few other things beside the fact that I have escaped from his and *your* cannibal clutches whole and entire. But why abuse your personal appearance? I see no one in the room to-night who looks better dressed than you do.'

'What a pity it is that, to be agreeable, one must so often be a liar !' says Miss Ponsonby, slowly flicking her fan to and fro.

'What a dear little speech !' retorts Vyner ; and then he laughs.

A small fountain somewhere behind them is dropping musically into its basin ; a cool wind is rushing through an open window. Miss Ponsonby, still idling prettily with her fan, no doubt appreciates to the full the enjoyment of the moment, because no words fall from her to break their spell.

'You have carried me back somehow to the old days,' says Vyner, presently. 'Just now it seems to me that I can see you again as you used to be when quite a little girl, with long soft hair almost down to your toes, and eyes a great deal too large for your face.'

'What a fetching picture !'

'It was, very. One seldom sees anything like it now ; but, though you were pretty, I don't think you were quite a nice little girl.'

'No ; I know I wasn't—to *you*. How I hate those quadrilles from "Madame Angot" ! Don't you ?'

'You used to tyrannise over me abominably.'

'That need not trouble you, seeing I can't tyrannise over you now.'

'It is not poetical justice, however. To have things properly balanced, I should be able to tyrannise over you by this time.'

"'Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere,'" quotes she, with a cold smile.

'You are still a tyrant, then?'

'At least, I would not submit.'

'Do you remember that day in the orchard,' asks Vyner presently, with a laugh of irrepressible enjoyment, 'when I was supposed to be doing Euclid, but was in reality stealing apples for you, and Dad came in and caught us; and—— By Jove, how long ago it all seems now!'

'So long that it has entirely slipped from my memory. There were so many boys off and on, and so many of them stole apples for me.'

'Well, they were pleasant days enough, even though you decline to grant them the small courtesy of a passing remembrance. We were very good friends then, you and I. Do you know'—glancing deliberately at her—'I think I used to be in love with you then?'

'I'm very thankful the folly did not grow beyond the "then,"' says Miss Ponsonby, raising her lids languidly and gazing at him with a full insolent glance.

'So am I, for some reasons. It would hardly have suited either of us, would it?'

'It would not have suited me, certainly.'

'Not *now*; then, at least, you tolerated me. It is absurd, almost presumptuous to remember it. 'But do you know in those bygone days,' says Vyner lightly, 'I used to call you my "little wife"? Happy Arcadian days! But very absurd—eh?'

'Very.' Miss Ponsonby, with a fatigued air and an impatient gesture, shuts up her fan and frowns slightly. 'How uninteresting you can be at times!' she says. 'If, as a boy, you were as dull in your *têtes-à-tête* as you now are, no wonder I treated you with scorn!'

'Well, but that's just it, you see; I don't think you *did* scorn me,' says Mr. Vyner, mildly.

At this moment, through the open doorway that leads into the dancing-room, one can see Sir Chicksy Chaucer perambulating aimlessly about, as though in search of some 'lost chord.'

'I don't think I ever saw Chaucer in evening clothes before,' remarks Vyner, thoughtfully, seeing she will take no notice of his last speech. 'How exceedingly—er—uncomfortable he looks! *They* shine, but he doesn't; they are new, I suppose.'

'And he—isn't? You pay him a very great compliment; yet six months should make one quite a dear old friend down here, when one is a baronet, unmarried, and with unlimited means.'

'You see he has kept himself so exceedingly dark for those six months,' remonstrates Mr. Vyner. 'We have scarcely been allowed to see him; now that he has condescended to emerge into the fuller glare—and in his best clothes too—we all bow down before him and acknowledge the effect—maddening!'

'I wonder why you so dislike him?' says Miss Ponsonby, with a curious smile.

'Far be it from me to dislike such a bright and shining light as he promises—*his guardian*—to be,' says Mr. Vyner, genially. 'His name alone should pull him through—it is a miracle of art. Is there its rival, I wonder? Shakespeare has weakly hinted that there is nothing in a name; but he had never heard Sir Chicksy's; surely there is much in it! Some names we are told "mock destruction; they survive the doom of all creation." Of such is your friend's; indeed, I think, if the poet said it "licked all creation," he would have been even nearer the mark.'

"Much wit hath commonly much froth, and 'tis hard to jest and not jeer too," quotes Audrey, demurely. 'And even Sir Chicksy has his uses. See now what a fund of amusement he is to you! How could you exist without such an one upon whom to strike the brilliant matches of pure genius that emanate from you so frequently?'

'You cover me with confusion,' says Mr. Vyner; but he does not look confused. 'I should not dare to find amusement in a Chaucer! And besides, you know, I honestly regard Sir Chicksy as a very nice, ladylike young man.'

'I know at least you have always a pretty tongue!' returns Miss Ponsonby, with a pale smile and an angry flash from her beautiful eyes.

'I wonder what he is looking for?' says Vyner, presently, as Sir Chicksy again crosses the doorway, apparently in high search for something. 'Is it for you?'

'Very likely.'

'I think he will go mad if left much longer in the dark as to your whereabouts. Are you without mercy? Did you note the expression on his face as he passed just now?'

'Did he pass just now?'

'Well, you could hardly call it a passing—it was a flight.'

'He will the sooner get to where he is going, then. And why should he go mad?'

'Too much learning! You know what a brain he has. Won't you let him see where you are, and so ease the strain a little?'

'If you want to go—go!' says Miss Ponsonby, abruptly. 'As for me, I shall do very well here. That Sir Chicksy should be looking for me does not concern me.'

'Your cruelty is barbaric.'

'Is it a necessity to you to make silly speeches?' asks the girl, with such profound contempt as wakens some faint amusement in the breast of her companion. 'I am not cruel. I simply make it a rule to be happy when possible, at all costs to others.'

There is something reckless and defiant in her tone as she turns her eyes to his.

'A very sensible sentiment!' returns he, blandly; yet there is a note in his voice hardly to be desired; it touches her.

'Why should I consider others?' she asks, sharply, noting and resenting it. 'Do they consider me? Do the silly fools round here who call themselves "society" regard me with even scanty favour? They turn aside from me because they have the money that I lack, and I the pedigree that they lack. They can't forgive me that last.'

'I think you might be content with it.'

'As long as I know poverty, I shall never know content,' returns she, in a low voice. 'But still that is not it; it is their settled dislike to me, the drawing away of their skirts, as it were, that angers me. They shake their heads and revile me, only because I have a lover or two more than *their* girls, and because—because—well'—with a frown—'because once or twice a recreant knight has deserted their ranks for mine! Do you know what that yellow-haired girl of Mrs. Drummond's called me the other day? "The recruiting sergeant," and all because of Mr. Allonby!' She pales visibly, and tears of passionate mortification rise to her large eyes. 'I never spoke



to that man twice,' she says, 'so it wasn't my fault; and, whether or no, he wasn't good enough; but I suppose her hair was too much for him! They accuse me of making their lovers false. Pah!' cries she, with a shrug and a bitter wild little laugh. 'I dare say I am not good for much myself; but I'm good for that, any way!'

'A proud boast!' says Vyner, carelessly.

'Ah! I have no doubt you side with them,' she says, biting her lips. 'One goes with the stream because it is least trouble; and I don't know why I talk to you like this, unless it is that I must say it to somebody.'

'Thank you,' says Vyner.

'They dare to be uncivil to me because Dad takes pupils. I detest that sort of person.'

'If so, I wonder that you care so much what "that sort of person" may or may not say of you.'

'That would be the correct feeling, of course; but I have no correct feelings, I think; at all events I do care. Oh, to be rich for once—enormously so, I mean, to see them all cringe and fawn to me as they do to others, and then spurn them!'

'To be rich—if that is your highest ambition—is surely within your reach. Remember'—airily—'your face. That is a fortune in itself.'

'A poor one!'

'A rare one.'

'I would gladly exchange it for a better,' she says, discontentedly. 'It brings me in but poor returns.'

'Utilise it, then!' says Vyner, turning to her with cold deliberation, and gazing straight into the beautiful, dissatisfied face beside him. 'If, as you say, money is your idol, gain it at all hazards. Compel your face to do you service.'

'But how?' asks she, half frowning; her tone is defiant, and, as though daring him to answer her question, she lifts her eyes resolutely to his.

'Try Sir Chicksy,' replies he, slowly, with an involuntary curl of his lip.

Across the girl's face passes an expression that would have startled him had he seen it. But, as the insult passes his lips, he withdraws his gaze, and is now looking steadily at the door beyond. Her lids have half closed, her colour has faded to an ashen grey, there is something that is almost murderous within the shadow that has fallen on her great gleaming eyes.

Sir Chicksy, his boyish, foolish face flushed with anxiety, at this instant comes towards her with a fatuous smile.

‘I—I’ve been all over the place looking for you,’ he says; ‘and now’—growing melancholy—‘our waltz is almost over.’

‘You shall have another one to make up for it,’ returns she, with such unwonted gentleness that the silly lad’s heart beats heavily against his breast. ‘And the next time I must tell you where to find me, so that there need be no disappointment for either of us.’

She smiles, lays her hand upon his arm, and moves away without a backward glance. When she is gone, Vyner rises too, and stretches his arms over his head lazily.

‘Well, I was a beast,’ he says, emphatically; ‘but—she deserved it!’

The final bars of the last waltz have died away into a sobbing silence. The greater charms of cool conservatories and empty corridors have weeded out the ball-room. So considerably, that now one can see without trouble who is and who is not present.

There are a few lanky young men; a few apparently starved; a few sweetly sad,—all these droop a little, and have decaying lilies in their button-holes, and are evidently breathing a purer, more ‘culchawed’ ether than those around them. If so, they must have evolved it from their inner consciousness, as every place, except the garden, is insufferably warm. There are, too, mixed up with these, a great many Philistines, unpardonably healthy, and lost in a misty ignorance of the sublime and the beautiful, yet looking very presentable withal.

One can see a few pretty women; a great many plain: one or two whose skins are as olive-green as their gowns, and a few whose garb is rather too much *à la Eden* to be glanced at openly.

Dick Bouverie, moving here and there among the crowd, but chiefly on the staircases and in the halls, for reasons best known to himself, at last catches sight of a little fragile figure that sets his heart beating, standing in a distant corner talking to Bruno.

It is Dolores! For a long time he has sought her, and now, all at once, she is there, standing out from all the others, a thing apart, as it seems to him, smiling, radiant—

Her face more fair

Than sudden-singing April in soft lands.

She is clad in a creamy Indian silk, soft and clinging, with

no sleeves to hide her perfect arms, and great high puffs on her shoulders. So clear is her pure skin that scarce one may say where the gown ends and her fair self begins. Every word and gesture is rounded with soft grace, each glance is full of infinite variety.

She is talking gaily to Bruno, with parted lips and shining, happy eyes uplifted to his. Then, in a moment, she sees Dick, and she wavers in her speech to Bruno, and the glad eyes send to the elder brother a smile of quick welcome.

Battling his way to her through the crowd of matrons, men, and virgins that separates them, Dick comes up to her presently, breathless, but victorious.

'Why, when did you come?' he asks, eagerly. 'How late you are!'

He has quite forgotten to say, 'How d'ye do, Miss Lorne?' or anything of that sort.

'It is quite a long time now since we came, isn't it?' says Dolores, appealing to Bruno. 'Half an hour at least! Late? Oh, yes; we were late. Auntie and I always are, I think.'

'How could I have missed you all this time?' says Dick, almost indignantly. 'I have been searching for you up hill and down dale for an hour or more—it seems like a *week* or more; if the truth be told.'

She glances at him quickly, and a little odd expression crosses her face. She opens her lips impulsively, as if to say something, and then repents herself apparently of her intention, because she closes them again without saying anything. But she breaks instead into a faint, low, irrepressible laugh.

'What is it?' asks Dick, who cannot take his eyes off her face, and has therefore marked her hesitation.

'Nothing,' returns she, demurely.

'Miss Lorne wants to tell you,' says Bruno, mildly, 'that to call a search for her *up-hill* work is rude.'

'Oh, *no*—no, indeed!' contradicts Miss Lorne, shocked, flushing warmly to the very roots of her short, sunny hair; 'that was not it at all! It was only—I merely wanted to say—that——'

She grows hopelessly confused, and her eyes seek the ground.

'What?' asks Dick again, gently.

'Never mind. Ask me some other time,' murmurs she, with an almost childish appeal to him not to press the subject.

'Well,' he says, quickly, 'I hope your card is not full

yet, though I am so late in finding you. I dare say—laughing—‘if I had not sought you so diligently, I should have found you long ago. What dance may I have?’

He has taken her programme from her.

‘Not this,’ she says. ‘I am engaged to your brother for this; but the next, if you will.’

‘And the ninth and the fifteenth?’—anxiously.

She looks undecided.

‘Oh, you *will*!’—pathetically. ‘They are the only dances vacant. And remember what ill luck I had in not being able to plead my cause with you at first!’

His manner is growing positively servile.

‘Don’t cry, Dick,’ entreats Bruno, whereupon they all laugh a little.

‘Miss Lorne, if you are going to be unkind to me in this matter, you will have much to answer for,’ says Dick, persistently. ‘You would not knowingly consign me to an early grave, would you?’

‘Don’t mind him, Miss Lorne,’ says Bruno. ‘He is quite too tough for that sort of thing. You take my word for it that the grave won’t see him for years to come. If you put faith in Dick’s promises to die, you’ll be disappointed.’

‘Alas, Mr. Bouverie, that your word should be so unreliable!’ says she, mischievously. ‘You do protest too much, it seemeth me. Fewer words and truer would be better. Have you forgotten “In muchē speechē sinnē wanteth not”?’

‘Well, punish me if you will,’ says Bouverie; ‘though I deny my guilt. But understand, at all events, that if you refuse me those two dances you leave me with nothing to do all night. Think then of the mischief my idle hands are sure to commit.’

‘Nothing to do? Go and dance with all the others.’

‘There are no others.’

‘No woman in the room but me?’

‘Not one!’

‘Oh, Mr. Bouverie! It was true, then, what your brother hinted about—about your veracity?’

‘I maintain,’ says Bouverie, stoutly, but in a low tone, ‘that for me there is no woman in these rooms to-night save and except yourself.’

A little smile gathers about her lips. She casts a swift glance at him and then looks down. Bruno is talking in an

interested fashion to some one near them, so that virtually they are alone.

'You shall have your dances,' she murmurs, softly, with an adorable blush.

'To thank you is impossible!' says Bouverie.

'Now, Dick, do go away!' exclaims Bruno, returning to his charge. 'I never saw such a fellow to talk as you are, and Miss Lorne and I want to finish our waltz and our conversation, though we have almost forgotten what it was about now. Is my partner the only one in the room that will satisfy you?'

'It seems so,' says Dick, with a quick glance at Dolores; then he bows slightly, and moves away with a half-formed intention of bribing the musicians to cut short the waltz now playing.

'What a beautiful old house this seems to be!' says Dolores, when he has gone, gazing round her. 'Is that the picture-gallery down there?'

'Yes. Would you like to see it by lamp-light? It is rather worth looking at when lit as it is at present.'

They go slowly towards it, guided by the clear light that streams from its many lamps within, and makes quite a little pathway of yellow glare all along the shining oaken floor.

'We've been here, you know, for centuries,' says Bruno, as they move leisurely down the almost deserted gallery—'that is, not exactly Dick or me, you know, but our people; and there is really nothing in the way of rascality we haven't done. We are old enough and disreputable enough for anything. There—that cavalier over there with the villanous squint was hanged for piracy on the high seas; and the one beside him was beheaded for murder in some forgotten reign; and the little innocent simpering thing just behind you poisoned her own husband because she wanted to marry some other woman's husband. We have been assassins and swindlers for a sufficient length of time to enable us now to call ourselves eminently respectable.'

'I don't think we have any shameful story in our family,' says Dolores, pondering regretfully.

'Then, take my word for it, you are not half so worthy of regard as we are,' says Bruno, laughing. 'Look at that old colonel over there. Isn't he like Dick? He is his great-grand-uncle, I think, or something of that sort.'

'He is like him, certainly.'

'Dick's a good sort, isn't he?' says Bruno, suddenly, turning to look at her.

'A very good sort, I should say,' she replies, smiling.

'You should not force Miss Lorne's hand,' murmurs Dick's voice behind them.

He looks down at Dolores with an amused glance.

'Do listeners hear bad of themselves? I don't believe it,' he says. 'This is our dance, Miss Lorne, I am glad to know.'

'So soon!' exclaims Bruno. 'Well, that was the shortest waltz I ever heard them play!'

'It really was, I think,' returns Bouverie, with an innocently thoughtful air.

Then Dolores lays her hand upon his arm, and goes down the handsome gallery and into the ball-room with him. As she does so, Sir George Bouverie, who has dragged himself away from his books, to do the civil to his cousin the duchess, exclaims excitedly—

'There now—who is that with Dick—eh, eh? Who is it—eh?'

'A most sweet face indeed!' says the duchess, earnestly.

'That is Miss Lorne—the latest acquisition to our society here,' answers Lady Bouverie, quite pleasantly for her.

'A very pretty one,' puts in her Grace.

'Because so fresh—a year will spoil her,' declares Lady Bouverie, in her insolent fashion. 'Meantime, I admit she is charming. You remember old Mr. Maturin, of Greylands? She is his grand-niece, and an heiress.'

'Is it much?' asks the duchess.

'She will inherit Greylands, we hear, and a considerable property in the North, and all her aunt, Miss Maturin's money, which amounts to a good sum.'

'A desirable wife for some one,' says her Grace, smiling; 'and what a face and figure for an Ophelia or a——' she pauses as though lost in thought.

'I hope she will suit Richard,' says Lady Bouverie, in her cold, measured tones. 'He seems very attentive to her. It is the one sensible move I have ever known him make. Her fortune would be of use to him.'

'He will certainly be open to congratulation if he gains her,' says the duchess, who was a handsome woman in her time, and has still a weakness for beauty.

'So will she, if she gains *him*,' returns Lady Bouverie, with some *hauteur*, to whom even a duchess—in her own

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Bouverie—are standing on the balcony from which the distant, scented, lighted gardens can be seen.

‘Why not, indeed?’ says Dick. ‘But first I must get something to wrap round you’—looking vaguely about him east and west.

‘No, no; I hate being muffled up, and the night is so warm that I can want nothing.’

‘Still, even pretence is necessary, as I promised your aunt most faithfully to take great care of you. And see—some providence has supplied me with the means! Let me cover your neck with this.’ ‘This’ is a white silken Indian shawl with long trailing fringes, lying on a couch hard by.

‘*Che sarà sarà*,’ says Dolores, bending her neck to the yoke.

‘Now you are like a naiad, a river-nymph,’ says Bouverie, gazing at her with tender admiration when he has wound the shawl round her little form, ‘and those fringes—they are the dropping water.’

‘What a fanciful thought!’ returns she, with dainty scorn, though in truth she is right well pleased with his compliment. ‘And the owner of this shawl’—doubtfully—‘what shall be said to her?’

‘To avoid the saying of anything, let us make our escape while it is yet possible,’ says Bouverie, taking her hand and leading her towards the steps that will bring her to the perfumed gardens.

As they go down these steps, some old thought occurs to him.

‘Why is your aunt so careful of you?’ he asks, slowly.

‘Because my mother was delicate,’ says the girl, pausing and looking at him with regretful eyes. ‘She died very young, you see. But’—the regret vanishing, and a saucy smile taking its place—‘I think the principal reason is that auntie would be quite miserable unless she was making a fuss about me.’ She pauses here, plucks a little bit of ivy from the wall, and then says shyly but anxiously, ‘You like auntie?’

‘I could hardly say how much,’ returns the young man, with such simple heartiness as convinces her of his truth. There is an increased sweetness in her face as she turns it to him.

‘I am glad of that,’ she says, ‘because’—naïvely—‘I want to like you, and I could not if you and Lallie were not friends.’ ‘Lallie’ is her pet name for Miss Maturin.



'Well, now you may like me as much as ever you will with a pure heart,' says Bouverie, laughing.

As he says this, it occurs to him that it is a very pure heart indeed that is looking at him out of those lovely eyes—

Eyes of deep soft lucent hue,  
Eyes too expressive to be blue,  
Too lovely to be grey.

And yet they *are* grey too, but dark and tender and loving.

They have descended the steps, have passed the ivied wall of the house, and have now entered the garden's enchanted grounds, where 'low and long the shadows creep' over great patches of silvery moonshine to lose themselves in quaint small beds filled full with lily flowers a-row.

Here and there, from arbours and deep dusky clumps of evergreens, shine out the coloured lamps; above them, pale with scorn of their poverty, the lamps of heaven are gleaming clear and calm; a mild wind stirs the air and rouses the scent of the roses. There, glimmers a satin robe; here, some filmy lace makes the soft darkness felt; and now, a ripple of merry laughter breaks from some unknown corner.

The moon came down the shining stair  
Of clouds that fleck the summer sky.  
She kissed thee, saying, 'Child, be fair,  
And madden men's hearts, even as I.  
Thou shalt love all things strange and sweet.'

Looking at the pale slender little maiden walking beside him, these words involuntarily come to Bouverie's mind. But silence, born of the beauty of the scene around, has fallen upon them both, and, mute as the sleeping nature upon which they gaze, they go through the mists of night. Then some little movement, some catching of her gown by an amorous rose-bush, kills their silence; and, as though not an instant has flown since his last speech, he says, slowly—

'Do *you* like *me*?'

'You know it,' replies she, very kindly, and without hesitation or confusion of any kind. 'See here!'—stopping to lay her fingers lightly on his arm. 'I will tell you something. I like you better than anybody I have met since I came here.'

A sudden and eager desire to kiss the dainty fingers of this dainty speaker is at this moment conscientiously and valorously overcome by Bouverie.

'What! Better than Bruno?' he asks, with an affectation of lightness, but with real concern.

'Pouf—yes,' exclaims she, with a faintly foreign gesture and the prettiest shrug of her shoulders.

'Yet Bruno is more calculated to please a little light-hearted girl like you than I am—a dull fellow like me.'

'Are you dull?' asks Dolores, raising her dark brows.

'Base flatterer!' says Bouverie, with a sudden pleased laugh. 'Yes, I am very dull, as you will in time discover.'

'Ah, well then,' with a quaint sweet glance, 'I know now that dull people are congenial to me! Yet I do not know'—archly—'that your last little speech altogether pleases me. "Birds of a feather," say they, "flock together." If your company suits me, that proves me dull too; your suggestion is not over-polite; is it?'

'There is another proverb,' says he, 'about "extremes meeting;" that should explain my seeming rudeness; and, indeed, to be even in thought rude to you would require more courage than I possess. Who else in this benighted spot has found favour in your sight? You see, I am only too glad to believe your statement that I have at least a small place there.'

'Many people; but your cousin Audrey, of all my women acquaintances, I like her best.'

'You will find yourself alone in that fancy, I think,' says Dick, who does not get on with Miss Ponsonby.

'No; auntie likes her too, and—and there are others.'

'Sir Chicksy, for example,' with an irrepressible laugh that is suggestive of mockery.

'He is very kind-hearted,' says Dolores, with a touch of reproof.

'I dare say. I wonder if Audrey means marrying him?'

'Oh, no, no!' hastily.

'Why that emphatic "No"?' She might do worse.'

'She might do so much better. And why marry him, if she does not love him?'

'To marry without love—is that a crime?'

'I think so.'

'It is committed daily, then, by very estimable people.'

'Poor things!' says Miss Lorne, with a gentle sigh. She seems so in earnest in this speech, to feel so deeply the importance of her subject, that Bouverie's eyes seek hers with a swift and rather distasteful curiosity.

'What do you know of love?' he asks, with subdued sharpness.

'Why, nothing,' returns she, slowly.

They have passed over the rustic bridge now, and gone beyond the sound of the laughter and the light fall of footsteps; there is a strange seductive calm on everything, broken only by the rapid rush of the stream as it hurries ever onward.

It is the 'mid-hour of night, when stars are weeping,' and the moon's richest rays are cast upon the earth; there is no chill, no damp in all the air, no touch of death in the glad luxuriance of the sleeping flowers. On such a night as this Eros lies broad awake with bended bow, and arrow poised for flight.

The bridge is passed, and under the dark myrtles they saunter slowly by grinning fauns and leering satyrs, and wood-nymphs slim and coy. Here Venus on a marble pedestal makes great ado to hide her gleaming limbs with her long yellow hair from the too-eager gaze of an adoring Apollo; a would-be dissolute Apollo, now for once in spite of him made decent, being clothed about with the long tendrils of the modest ivy.

And now they have come to another little stream that no bridge spans, a tumbling merry baby of a river that divides them from a fairy-like spot that, because unattainable, seems to them even more desirable than those through which they have been wandering.

'I wish we could get across,' says Dolores, hesitating on the high bank at this side to look longingly over to where the great amber roses are nodding drowsily beneath Diana's mystic rays.

'There is a walk that will take us round to the other side, but it is a good deal higher up,' says Bouverie; 'and it isn't worth while our trying to find it when one spring would land us where we would be. If you will give me your hand I think it can be done.'

She has gathered up the tail of her white gown and thrown it over a bare soft arm that is even whiter; her other arm she stretches out to Bouverie.

'But what if I were to jump short?' she says, nervously, glancing downwards somewhat fearfully at the swift stream dancing so blithely in the moonlight, and chanting gaily as it flies over its pebbles and past its flowery weeds. 'I should be

a veritable naiad then indeed,' with an arch glance at him from under her long lashes. 'But, in spite of the poetry contained in that thought, I think I should prefer to be dry.'

'Trust yourself to me,' says Bouverie, assuringly.

The words, as he says them, are simple ones and really mean nothing; but, when they are said, it seems as though an echo of them comes back to him fraught with deepest intent. In the strange future that lies before her, to whom will she trust herself? And if, perchance, to some one like him—like him!—how will he discharge his trust? And if to another—— His fingers close with sudden half-angry vehemence over hers.

'Come!' he says, and to himself his voice sounds harsh.

She leans towards him, still with her eyes upon the mad little river beneath.

'Oh, it is farther than I thought!' she says, drawing back a little.

Lightly, but with a certain determination, he slips his arm round her waist and inclines her towards the stream.

'Now spring!' he says.

And then, in another moment, she finds herself standing beside him on the opposite bank, untouched by spray or running water.

'Well, you see, you *did* trust yourself to me!' he is saying, a certain irrepressible gaiety in his tone. He is indeed feeling unaccountably, foolishly glad that, at the last moment, she had not shrunk from him.

'So I did. And, after all, there was no cause for fear!' returns she, smiling.

Her hand is still lying within his, clasped firmly. She has perhaps forgotten to withdraw it, and he perhaps is in no hurry to release it. As she stands thus before him, with uplifted chin and laughing eyes and dainty slender figure framed in by yellow roses, she is looking even more than beautiful.

'Tell me,' he says, earnestly, 'why you hesitated so long about giving me those two dances when we first met to-night?'

'If I hesitated,' she says, looking down, and shyly moving a pebble to and fro with the point of her shoe, 'it was not—not that I did not mean to give them.'

'Yet you certainly thought twice before granting them. Were they—perhaps—intended for some other man?'

'Oh, no,' quickly, 'indeed no! You must not think that.'

'I did think it. I felt so sure of it for one moment that I

was very near accepting your hesitation as a final refusal, and going away heartbroken.'

'Oh, well,' she says, smiling too, 'I am glad you thought better of it! If'—raising her eyes for an instant to his, with a soft glance, adorable, but all too swift—'if you had taken me at my word, I should have—been——'

'What?' he asks, eagerly.

'Disappointed,' she replies, slowly.

'I wish I dared to believe that,' says Bouverie.

'You may. Why,' with a little soft, embarrassed laugh, 'if I must confess it, I had kept them for you! Now you believe?'

'To disbelieve would cost me too much. Though "fairy gold be all my gain," still I prefer to think as you would have me do.'

'There is little real faith in all that speech,' says Miss Lorne, with some slight indignation. Then suddenly, 'Do you know how long we have been here? *Hours* it seems to me. Come let us return.'

'There is just one thing more,' protests he, detaining her.

'What was it you would not say to me before Bruno?'

'Before Bruno?'

'Yes. I had been telling you of my long and fruitless search for you, when you—laughed. I asked you why you laughed; but you would not answer me, and only told me to ask you about it some other time. This is "some other time."'

'Is it?'

'Isn't it?'

'What a cross-examiner you would make!' retorts she, with a slight shrug. 'Well, let me think about it. I believe,' looking down, 'I am not sure you know, but I suppose'—reluctantly—'I was wondering where the necessity was for your searching for me at all.'

'Ah,' says Bouverie—something in her tone has bitterly offended him—'I dare say it did seem ludicrous to you—my anxiety to find you, I mean. It certainly sounds so, as you put it.'

'Now I have made you angry!' exclaims she, with impatient penitence. 'And why? Simply because I want a reason for your having given yourself very unnecessary trouble about me.'

'I should think your instinct might have supplied that reason,' replies he, coldly.

'Perhaps I am without instinct, then, because I *don't* know !' declares she, petulantly. 'At least, I fail to see why it should not seem strange to me—your wasting an hour or so trying to find me.'

'If one could not see by your eyes that—that certain things were impossible to you, one might,' begins he hastily, and then as hastily checks himself. 'Regard my conduct as a folly, then, if you will,' he says, stiffly.

'I am sorry if I have vexed you,' says Dolores, looking at him strangely. 'But yet I meant no unkindness—none. And I do not think it is a good thing to lose one's temper about nothing ; do you ?'

'But is it about nothing ? Do you think I don't want you to know—to understand ?' exclaims he, with some suppressed vehemence. Then he grows suddenly calm again. 'If I sought you,' he says, with deliberation, 'it was because I desired to be with you—to see, to hear you. That is plain-speaking, at all events, and will prevent your being puzzled by me in future, or regarding my conduct as "strange." But *why* did you so regard it ? Were there,' watching her eagerly, 'no others in your life to whom your presence meant what it does to me ?'

'A few—perhaps,' returns she, with slight hesitation—a hesitation he misconstrues.

'For "few," read "legion,"' he says, brusquely. 'Well, and did all their insane devotion wake mirth within your breast ?'

'No.' She is growing a little nervous now, and the blood is changing rapidly beneath her transparent skin. 'Many people have been kind to me,' she says, 'and I do not think any of them, *except you*, would have called their attentions to me "insanity." And, as for you—it was not "mirth" I felt that you should give yourself trouble on my account, but only surprise.'

Then her manner changes altogether. Her nervousness vanishes ; she throws up her little stately head with a proud gesture, and turns her eyes full on his.

'To get back to the house, is it necessary I should cross this stream again ?' she asks calmly, without a trace of anger or any undue coldness—yet his heart dies within him.

'Not unless you wish it. That path I told you of, before we crossed it, will take you even more quickly to the house.'

'That is fortunate. I have too long delayed,' she says, quietly, turning away from him.

For a little while they are silent as they go along the gravelled walk ; and then, as though unable longer to abstain from expression of his fear, he says, in a low voice full of earnest entreaty—

‘ Let there be no coldness between us two ! ’

‘ Neither now, nor at any other time,’ she says, softly, turning to him with a sudden friendly smile.

## CHAPTER VI.

Wild mulberries for her mouth to eat,  
She'll get nae mair though it garred her greet.

SWINBURNE.

Lo, sweet, if I durst not pray to you,  
Then were I dead.

SWINBURNE.

THE hours are flying on fleet wings. Already the pale early summer morning is showing about the dark hill-tops. The duchess has twice yawned distinctly, but, with an estimable good nature, has forbore from leaving, lest a general break-up should follow on her departure. Young people, with a view to prevent any elderly attempts at withdrawal, are going about stating eagerly, as a happy fact, that *now indeed* they are beginning to enjoy themselves. Mothers with marriageable daughters are trying heroically not to look sleepy—mothers without them are murmuring of carriages.

‘ Any hope that I may have another dance with you ? ’ asks Vyner, coming face to face with Miss Ponsonby in a doorway.

‘ My card is quite full. She had met his eyes for a moment ; but now her own are turned contemptuously aside, and it is certainly the wall beyond she addresses as she says this, not him.

‘ May I see it ? ’

‘ Certainly,’—she lifts the little scented card attached to her fan, and waves it idly to and fro ; for an instant her half-closed lids, insolently lowered, are raised to let the dark angry beauty of her eyes be seen—‘ a pretty programme, is it not ? ’ she says.

‘ May I see the inside of it ? ’

‘ But why ? The inside of one card is quite the same as another.’

'Not always. And I am anxious to see what is written in yours.'

'You are anxious, in other words, to see whether I am or am not telling a lie!' returns she, with a soft scornful laugh.

'That is an ugly word! All I want to see is what names are on your card.'

'There is no dance there for you. In that at least you may believe me.'

'I believe you always. What you mean is that you refuse to give me a dance?'

'Is it?' She looks bored, and makes a slight movement, as if to go into the ball-room. Sir Chicksy, who is with her, moves too.

'I suppose you have given my dance away, then,' says Vyner, indifferently, drawing back. 'I regret very much you should have seen cause to do so.'

'Did I give you another? I had forgotten it. If so, I regret my seeming rudeness,' returns she, studied dislike in her tone. Then she sweeps away from him in her swaying, graceful, insolent fashion, and is lost in the throng of dancers beyond.

'What an insolent air that girl has!' says Mrs. Drummond, the sugar-merchant's daughter, who, with her dear friend Mrs. Dovedale beside her, has witnessed Audrey's dismissal of Vyner.

The speaker is a tall, stout, florid woman, with a superabundance of flesh and a toned vulgarity that breaks its bonds occasionally, and asserts itself with a triumphant rush. Her companion, Mrs. Dovedale, is as perfect a contrast to her as she—Mrs. Dovedale—could possibly desire. The rector's wife is a small, fair, childish, innocent-looking little thing, with forget-me-not eyes and a dimpled chin and remarkably thin lips. From those lips, so daintily curved, fall little speeches now and then so wonderfully spiced, so delicately pointed, so cruelly apt, that few care to provoke them. Time has taught her neighbours to treat this pretty little woman with careful respect. Time has also taught them to detest her cordially. Yet, strange to say, there are few people in all Deadmarsh so universally *fêted* as quiet Mrs. Dovedale. Her soft but rather mocking laughter is to be heard everywhere. Her charming blue eyes that know no shrinking are to be met with at any ball and dinner in the country, at the most select *matinées*, and at the very 'smallest and earliest' of receptions.

'Yes, insolent,' repeats Mrs. Drummond, with vigour,



turning to her companion for corroboration. 'And how Mr. Vyner detests her! I have frequently noticed his positive aversion. Haven't you, dear?'

'I'm so wretchedly unremarking!' says Mrs. Dovedale, apologetically. 'You will see that when I tell you I have often believed him rather attentive to her than otherwise.'

She does not really believe this; but the knowledge that Mrs. Drummond looks upon Anthony Vyner as a possible suitor for the hand of her daughter Georgina compels her to say it.

'You are indeed wanting in penetration if you could think that,' says Mrs. Drummond, with a sour smile; 'such an uninteresting girl as she is, and—and so reprehensible in many ways! Why, even her own aunt, dear Lady Bouverie, does not countenance her!'

'I think she is afraid of her,' says Mrs. Dovedale, with an irrepressible laugh. 'But, of course, one can understand that she is a trial. Such shocking form, as you say—quite inadmissible!'

'I hate a settled coquette!' declares Mrs. Drummond, whose daughter's lover, because of Audrey, had proved faithless. 'Artfulness of that sort can be acquired, I suppose, and men—who are all but poor creatures—may be seduced by it; but worth must gain the day in the long run.'

'The worst of it is, one is so terribly tired after a long run,' says Mrs. Dovedale, in her sweet, innocent, high treble, and with a little childish shake of her head. 'But I'm sure I'm not surprised you dislike Audrey—there is, as you say, something about her—that——'

'"Dislike" is a strong word; but,' says Mrs. Drummond, virtuously, 'I think there can be no harm in saying I rejoice, in that no one of any consequence has taken notice of that girl to-night.'

Here the conversation suffers a slight break, because of Audrey's approach. She passes without vouchsafing either of them so much as a glance of recognition, going by them slowly, with the contemptuous air of one who, knowing them near, still purposely declines to acknowledge their presence; she disappears into a windowed recess near, and sinks upon a cushioned lounge.

'Audrey,' says Bruno Bouverie, coming up to her, 'the duchess has expressed a wish that you should be introduced to her.'

Audrey flushes. She is out of humour, and indeed in one of her very worst moods.

'I have expressed no wish to be introduced to the duchess,' she answered sharply, with a frown. And then she grows suddenly pale again, and stands erect and defiant, though inwardly shocked at her discourtesy, as the curtains part and the duchess herself comes towards her.

'Must I then sue for your friendship?' says her Grace, with a smile.

'I beg your Grace's pardon,' says Audrey, slowly, but with a certain *hauteur* that belongs to her, and so becomes her. 'Your desire to know me must, of course, be regarded as an honour, though the desire itself must for ever remain a mystery to me.'

'Tut, child!' says the duchess, with an amused glance. 'A fair face is ever an introduction in itself, and that you carry about with you, whether you will or no.'

'Did you mark that?' says Mrs. Drummond, exultingly. 'She cannot be civil even to her Grace. Was there ever a girl with such an ill-regulated mind? I am now doubly rejoiced that I have not sent her an invitation to my ball on the twenty-third. Georgina would not hear of it. She is very sensible, and she really can't bear Miss Ponsonby.'

'I am not surprised at that,' says Mrs. Dovedale, so fervently, yet so artlessly, that her friend, after a swift doubt, fails to accuse her of any *arrière pensée*; 'but no doubt she has some good qualities, poor thing!'

'I greatly doubt it,' says Mrs. Drummond, severely. 'If I thought you could believe——'

'Hu-sh! The duchess is talking again,' interrupts little Mrs. Dovedale, in a peculiar tone.

'I have besides a favour to ask of you,' her Grace is saying in her sweetest manner. 'My daughter, Lady Florence, has set her heart on getting up some private theatricals whilst staying down here—just a short play or two. Will you help her? We want to get up a little company from among our neighbours here'—with a friendly smile—'and your face tells me you will be a great acquisition to our forces if you will consent to join us.'

This is the very essence of graciousness; and Mrs. Dovedale, watching her friend closely, can see that her face grows pale as she listens.

'Audrey can act most parts, from a dairymaid to a

duchess,' says Bruno, with a little saucy laugh and a glance at her Grace.

'Very good, then ; she shall illustrate me,' says her Grace, smiling. At this Audrey lifts her eyes, and a slow, pretty smile widens her lips.

'Oh, no,' she says ; 'but you shall make me the dairymaid, or anything else that pleases you !'

'I shall promise you a principal part,' says the duchess, kindly. 'And there is a little Miss Lorne here to-night, and Mrs. Wemyss, whose father was—a very old friend of mine. We must get them to join us too. And you must all three give me the pleasure of your company at the castle for a week or so, to get things well together.'

'Did you hear that ?' demands Mrs. Dovedale, with rather unpleasant vivacity. 'She has actually invited that—what was it you called her ?—artful—eh ?—yes, that *artful* girl, to spend a week at the castle !'

'I heard her,' says Mrs. Drummond, who has now grown positively livid.

'What a pity she didn't ask Georgina too !' murmurs Mrs. Dovedale, with suspicious sympathy.

'I have no doubt she would have done so had she been brought beneath her notice,' says Mrs. Drummond, with dignity.

'Eh—oh, I don't think Georgina is beneath her notice !' protests Mrs. Dovedale, with generous correction. 'Even though she is a duchess, I don't think'—with maddening misapprehension—'you need say that.'

'It will be a terrible thing for you, dear, if this slight deafness grows on you,' says Mrs. Drummond, tartly, and with ill-suppressed rage. 'Georgina is a girl whom the queen might delight to honour. I simply meant that the duchess was unfortunate enough not to see her. Georgina is not a bold girl, like some others I could name ; she is not one to push herself forward.'

'I don't think it was that,' says Mrs. Dovedale, mildly. 'Indeed, I know for a fact that the duchess *did* see her ; she took great notice of her.'

'Did she indeed ?' exclaims Mrs. Drummond, eagerly. 'Ah, she would, no doubt ! There is something striking about my girl.'

'She spoke of her. I was standing very near her Grace at the time, and could overhear what she said,' continues Mrs.

Dovedale, with a glance at her friend full of the gentlest encouragement.

'Yes; and what was it you heard, dear?' asks Mrs. Drummond, with a painful but useless effort to appear indifferent.

'She said, "Who is that big girl over there, with the hopelessly uninteresting face?" returns the vicar's wife, very sweetly.

The colour flames into the placid cheeks of her companion. She turns venomous eyes upon little Mrs. Dovedale, only to meet the eyes of that small lady calmly bent on her with an expression in them so open, so guileless, so devoid of harmful intention, as to disarm the severest suspicion.

'She could not have meant Georgina!' says Mrs. Drummond, in a stifled tone.

'I think she did, because I heard Lady Bouverie say, in answer, "That is a person called Miss Drummond."'

The 'person' does it! It sounds even worse than all that has gone before, and more humiliating. Mrs. Drummond grows limp and loses courage, and literally goes down before it. Alas, alas! Will no one ever forget about that sugar?

'A cursory glance such as the duchess cast at Georgina could never tell one much,' she says, with a last faint attempt to hold her position.

'Yet just such another cursory glance gained Miss Ponsonby her invitation to the castle,' Mrs. Dovedale kindly reminds her, with unremitting sweetness and unremitting cruelty too; 'but, as you say, Miss Ponsonby is a bold, forward girl, and you have indeed reason to be glad you have publicly denied her a card for your ball. You feel no foolish but kind-hearted regrets about it now, dear; do you?'

'There is in this last question so large a sympathy in look and tone, bound up with such an undercurrent of malice, as finally routs Mrs. Drummond. 'Curses not loud, but deep,' she casts upon her friend, the vicar's poor but well-born wife; and, rising, mutters something of home, and makes haste to put space between them.

'I wonder,' says Mrs. Dovedale to herself, a strange smile lighting up her infantile face, 'if, in the future, she will find that great joy in trying to patronise a baronet's daughter that, up to the present, has been her chiefest delight. She is tough—very; but I think I scored to-night!'

And now the final break-up has come. The duchess has

already gone, the carriages are thinning. Dolores is standing in the hall waiting for hers, whilst Bouverie, with slow care, is wrapping her in her cloak of ruby plush.

'A while since I said you looked like a fairy ; I wonder now how I had the courage,' says Bouverie, as he struggles manfully with the fastenings. 'In that royal colour you look like a queen. *Must* you go ? How I hate punctual servants ! One moment !' sinking his voice to a lover-like whisper. 'May I call to-morrow ?'

'But of course ! It is our day, you know ; and—and I am sure auntie will be very glad to see you.'

'That assurance pleases me indeed ; but there is another that, if you could give it, would please me infinitely more. Will *you* be glad to see me ?'

'I shall indeed !' She says this very softly and with a shy, sweet little blush. Then—'Good-night'—holding out to him her hand.

'Good-night. Good-bye.'

'Until to-morrow,' smiling.

'That means to-day,' returns he, quickly, unmistakable happiness on his handsome face. 'But a few hours lie between now and our next meeting.'

'Ah, true ; I had forgotten that.'

There is a touch of real pleasure in her tone that sets his heart beating, and bring to his lips words, not more ardent than his thoughts, but expressive of a deeper tenderness than he has dared yet to show.

'A few hours,' he repeats, unsteadily, 'will bring me to you again. And until then, and after, and *for ever*, I shall hold you—and you only—in my heart.'

Then the carriage door is closed upon her, and her face is hidden, purposely turned from him, as it seems to Bouverie, standing remorsefully upon the stone steps, with the chilly morning air beating upon his uncovered head. What madness had prompted him to say so much ? Has he frightened her, has she thought him unpardonably rude ? And yet what a small, *small* portion it was, of the passionate feeling that is consuming him ! 'Oh, the little more, and how much it is !'

Was she angry ? Looking down he catches sight of a pale little blossom lying down at his feet. It was hers ; she had worn it close to her bosom to-night ! it now is his ! As though it is some fair messenger of peace from her to him, he lifts it gladly and carries it indoors and up to his own room.

## CHAPTER VII.

What shall be said between us here  
Among the downs between the trees ?

Who knows what word were best to say  
On this sweet day !

SWINBURNE.

UPON the upper part of the lawn, near the tennis ground, a good many rugs and pretty garden-chairs are scattered broadcast. Greylands, lying as it does now in the brilliant June sunshine, is at its best, with its waving trees and its glimpse of the cool green sea, its old grey walls and ivied towers.

Dolores, in a huge white hat that makes her look like an overgrown fairy, is moving here and there in pretty restless fashion from one visitor to another, as though last night's fatigue and late hours are all mere hallucinations of the brain. Her restlessness is perhaps a little feverish, her gaiety somewhat strained ; but none except those who love her would notice it, and as for the rest, they vote her manner even more than usually charming to-day. The soft dark circles beneath her eyes only render them more rich in pathetic beauty, the two warm touches of carmine on her cheeks but serve to throw out the dazzling fairness of her skin. She is gracious, courteous, sympathetic, as ever, yet always her glance turns to that corner of the grounds from whence new-comers may be expected.

'She is the very prettiest creature I know,' says Mrs. Wemyss, with unaffected admiration, turning to Bruno Bouverie, who is lounging beside her. As a rule, he always is lounging beside her. It is a flirtation of such old standing now between these two—quite a year in all—that people have almost forgotten to gossip about it and wonder over their teacups if it will ever come to anything.

Cecily Wemyss is a widow, a very young widow, and a very light-hearted one. Indeed, ever since the death of her husband—of whom, as the dead cannot defend themselves, the least said the better—her spirits have risen to such an abnormal height that it must be uncharitably believed that she was heartily glad to get rid of him. She is small, dark, piquante, a brunette in effect, *pur et simple*—well, perhaps not

very simple—with laughing eyes and merry lips, and hair that finds subjugation difficult.

‘I dare say,’ says Bruno. ‘But of whom are you talking?’

‘Of Miss Lorne.’

‘You are right there’—with mild enthusiasm; ‘she is out and out the prettiest girl I know.’

‘Is she?’

‘The prettiest *girl*!’ returns Bruno, with careful emendation.

‘Ah!’ says Mrs. Wemyss. Then she laughs a little and glances at him from under artfully lowered lids. ‘That last was clever,’ she says.

She unfurls an enormous black fan, and waves it to and fro to the great discomfiture of a big bumble-bee, which, made dizzy by the storm thus raised, falls heavily, sleepily into her lap, and begins explorations there among her laces. There is a tremulous tranquillity in all the air that soothes the senses and renders speechlessness no crime, but rather a necessity. Quivering sunbeams are creeping from flower to flower, the swift stream at the foot of the lawn is making sweetest music as it rushes by its shelving banks, where close to

The river’s trembling edge  
There grow broad flag-flowers, purple pranked with white.

‘Still thinking of the most charming being you know?’ murmurs Mrs. Wemyss at last, closing her fan with a little snap, and raising two great lustrous eyes to his.

‘Yes,’ says Bruno.

‘She should be flattered. Five, six—nay, seven minutes—and all spent on her.’

‘I have spent more time than that on her without awakening any gratitude within her breast.’

‘It is your modesty that makes you say that. How can you know what thoughts are stirring in her breast?’

‘I don’t believe any thoughts are stirring there; it is too frozen to admit of movement.’

‘Oh, how you malign her!’

‘Do I? You should know best.’

‘Then I will prophesy to you that your wooing—if you put sufficient heart into it—will prosper.’

‘If you can assure me of that, it is the best news I have heard for many a day; yet I have my doubts.’

‘A true lover always doubts. But why should you believe her ungrateful?’

'She looks so.'

'I don't agree with you. I think she looks only happy,' says Mrs. Wemyss, with one swift glance at Dolores, who is laughing merrily.

'That is no good sign.'

'What!'—archly. 'Would you have your love always on the very verge of despair? That is so like a man! See now how much prettier she looks when laughing.'

'She is not laughing.'

'How can you say that? What! Has Cupid indeed made you blind?'

'I cannot see that she is laughing.'

'Why, where are your eyes?'

'On you,' says Bruno.

'Oh, then, of course you can't see her!'

'I can, indeed.'

'Who?'

'We were talking of my love, I think, weren't we?' says he, with an assumption of meekness, but with the most glaring audacity. Whereupon they both laugh.

'May the gods grant you sense!' says Mrs. Wemyss, with a little scornful tilting of her chin.

'And you a kinder mind. Amen!' returns he.

'Already it is *too* kind. It is well I am not of a jealous disposition.'

'I would you were a trifle more so; it would betoken deeper feeling.'

'"Out and out the prettiest thing you knew!"'—reproachfully.

'If you believed that nonsensical speech, it didn't seem to *affect* you much'—still more reproachfully. 'You would have made me over to her with a light heart, I do believe. Perhaps it would have been an easy way of getting rid of me.'

'Whose kingdom is so large that she would seek to rid herself of her best possession?' asks she, in a low tone and with an adorable glance.

A little shout from the triumphant side of the tennis-court breaks upon their left. Then sides are changed, and the game begins again, the abrupt and uncertain sound of the balls falling pleasantly upon the monotonous noises of Nature.

'You two always seem to me to be the happiest people in



the world,' says Dolores, coming up to them presently and sinking into a seat near Mrs. Wemyss.

'I say, Bruno, where is Dick?' asks Vyner, who has also strolled up to them more in the wake of Audrey Ponsonby than actually with her.

'I can't think,' answers Bruno. 'Perhaps he didn't mean coming.'

'He did,' says Audrey, who is looking really beautiful, but listless and cold as usual.

'He told you so, perhaps?' asks Vyner, who seems anxious in a lazy sort of way to bridge over the unpleasantness of last night.

'No,' returns Miss Ponsonby, uncompromisingly, gazing not at him, but at something that isn't in the 'far, far distance.'

'The information is vague, but full of interest,' remarks Mr. Vyner, unabashed. 'It gives us every hope that he has been foully murdered. Miss Ponsonby, the last person who saw him alive, at precisely thirty-five minutes and twenty-one seconds after three A.M., declares on oath he was then bent on being here early to-day. Has any one telegraphed to Scotland Yard?'

'I shouldn't wonder if our beloved mother had sent him all the way to Horton to make some modest purchase,' says Bruno. 'It would be just like her, considering the day is eighty in the shade.'

'Let us be thankful, at all events,' murmurs Mr. Vyner, piously, 'that it wasn't to make some *immodest* purchase. One should always, my dear Bruno, be grateful for small mercies. Miss Ponsonby, I can see, agrees with me.'

No response from Miss Ponsonby, not even a quiver of the eyelids to show she had heard so much as the mention of her name.

'A warm day, indeed, to go as far as Horton!' says Dolores, lightly.

Yet her face had changed at the mention of Bouverie's name. Had he kept purposely away? Had he repented him of those few hurried, honeyed words last night?

'Here comes Mrs. Dovedale,' says Cecily Wemyss, suddenly, 'and with her her *fidus Achates*, of course, in all her war-paint. How I detest that Mrs. Drummond and her Georgie! I never know which is the more objectionable of the two.'

'Or the three,' says Bruno. 'Mrs. Dovedale is to me as

objectionable as the others. Her tongue is sharper than the serpent's tooth. See now how tenderly she smiles upon Miss Maturin. I dare say she has taken her completely in, and made her believe her "altogether such an one as herself."

'That would be a simple task,' says Dolores, with a fond glance at Miss Maturin, who is smiling her kindest at the vicar's wife. 'Auntie is always sure that every one she meets thinks just as she does.'

Here the vicar's wife leaves Miss Maturin and goes trippingly across the lawn to some one for whom she has a barbed arrow in quiver. She is, therefore, looking quite her sweetest, and has a simple little pompadour gown on her, and a baby hat that suits her down to the ground.

'How very picturesque and idyllic!' says Vyner, softly.

'Dear little saint! I wonder what venom lies beneath that simper?' suggests Mrs. Wemyss.

'I would not be Mrs. Harcourt'—the woman now addressed by Mrs. Dovedale—'at this moment for a good round crown,' declares Bruno, which certainly is not much of a sum, but is evidently meant to represent a fabulous amount, the very roundness of it being a guarantee of its immensity.

'She's a nightmare,' says Vyner; 'but still, I think, can hardly hold comparison with her patron in that respect. Oh! for that Mrs. Drummond, and, oh! for her Georgie! Eh—ah! *How* d'ye do, Mrs. Drummond? *So* glad to see you! Your daughter here to-day?'

'Yes, over there,' says the matron, blandly. 'I'm sure she would be glad if you would see her through a game of tennis. She plays well—excellently well, I may say, but she is *so* nervous! Quite a child in many ways, I assure you.'

'She looks it,' murmurs Vyner, tenderly.

'By Jove, here's Chicksy!' exclaims Bruno, when Mrs. Drummond has carried herself off. 'Better late than never! I wonder who makes his clothes? They are the tightest fit I ever saw!'

'He dresses himself very well, I think,' says Mrs. Wemyss, who is good-natured.

'On the principle that "fine feathers make fine birds." Well, he is wise!' says Bruno.

'Now I wonder why on earth he wears that eye-glass?' remarks Mr. Vyner, plaintively. 'The very mental anxiety connected with the fixing of it, to say nothing of the injury to his sight, must be terribly wearing to his constitution!'

‘Oh, don’t fret about him!’ says Bruno, with tender anxiety. ‘I assure you it does him no harm; he always takes it out when he wants to see.’

‘He is very clever, is he not?’ asks Dolores, in perfect good faith. ‘He is very well read, I mean, and likely to take honours and that?’

At first there is an astonished silence, and then every one laughs involuntarily, forgetful of manners and all the rest of it. Even Audrey, after a swift, curious glance at Dolores, gives way to low but unrestrained mirth.

‘There is no knowing what he isn’t going to take,’ says Mr. Vyner, with a swift glance at Audrey; ‘but, in accordance with his appearance, which is charmingly youthful, I should say measles first, after that mumps, and so on. We should be proud to have such an erudite youth in our midst. Do you feel proud, Mrs. Wemyss?’

‘I’m too meek a woman for that,’ laughs Mrs. Wemyss. ‘Pride and I parted company many a day ago, and I have felt much more comfortable ever since.’ As she says this, she smiles kindly at Audrey, who is moodily trifling with a large moss-rose. ‘And, after all, it is quite a shame of us to laugh at Sir Chicksy, because he has more good points than most of us.’

‘He has, indeed,’ says Bruno. ‘If you mean his elbows and knees, I never saw a man in all my life so oppressed with them. Why, they are all over him!’

‘Mrs. Wemyss is right,’ says Vyner, with suspicious gravity. ‘Let us cease from evil speaking. Sir Chicksy is not to be despised. He wears good clothes, has money, a title, and no relations; he is considered clever by one very charming young lady, and is the sworn admirer of another—I mention no names, so no actions can be taken—and is, on the whole, a very nice girlish boy. I myself regard him with the very keenest veneration! Have I summed up all those good points you mentioned, Mrs. Wemyss?’

‘You laugh! But do you know he reads poetry very well indeed?’ says Dolores, who is a tender little soul, with whom the absent are always right. ‘He came up here the other day and read “Locksley Hall” for auntie and me, and we were quite pleased.’

The two men look at her, and perhaps at the same moment the same thought runs through both their minds. At all events, it is a very kindly glance she gets from each.

'He is fortunate at least in having so sweet a champion,' says Vyner, gently, with a little graceful bend of his head.

'He isn't a bad old chap when all is told,' acknowledges Bruno, with a sudden and most unexpected clemency.

'Here come the Montgomerys!' cries Mrs. Wemyss, suddenly. 'I wonder if there is any one in the county who *isn't* here? I expect'—turning with a genial smile to Dolores—'that this is going to be the one popular house in the neighbourhood. Mine used to be the general rendezvous, at least'—with a glance at Bruno—'boys found it a useful place in which to air their griefs and joys. But now I give in to your aunt—I cede popularity—*all* to her. I may as well before I *must*. Submission is more honourable than defeat.'

'What a cowardly sentiment!' laughs Miss Maturin, who has strolled up to them, her heavier duties being at an end. She has, indeed, longed secretly at heart to be with them for an hour or more, silly youth being always dearer to her than sober age. She lays her hand now on Audrey's shoulder, who is nearest to her. 'I hope you will all come here just as often as ever you like,' she says, kindly with a comprehensive glance. 'Not'—laughing—'that I have any right to invite you. There'—indicating Dolores with a slight wave of her hand—'stands the little mistress of Greylands.'

'Yes, I am the real *châtelaine*. This is but my slave and vassal,' retorts Dolores, saucily, but with the proudest, fondest smile at Miss Maturin. Slipping her hand through her arm, she presses close to her in a little confiding tender fashion.

Here the conversation is interrupted by the approach of servants armed with trays and small round tables, and a happy confusion of tea, curaçoa, strawberries and cream, cakes, and brandy and soda.

'Nothing like soda after being up all night,' says Bruno, cheerfully.

'Plain,' supplements Mr. Vyner, severely.

'I don't think I ever saw so many ugly women together as I saw last night,' says Audrey, suddenly, without any preface. 'I hate unpresentable people!'

'I thought all the women shockingly *fagotées*, certainly,' acquiesces Mrs. Wemyss, with a shrug. 'But what will you? Beauty is a rare weed, and the art of dressing up to one's style almost unknown.'

'I liked that queer-coloured gown on the duchess,' says Dolores. 'It was old-fashioned, but somehow it suited her.'

It was a sort of kindness to her complexion, her choosing that colour.'

'What a speech from you !' exclaims Vyner, opening his eyes. 'It only shows that the very sweetest of us can sometimes be severe.'

'Was that severe ?' asks Dolores, colouring. 'I didn't mean it. But, indeed, it occurred to me that—that in anything but that shade she might not look her—her *best* !'

At this everybody laughs a little.

'*A bas les Jesuits !*' says Bruno, with a downward motion of his hands.

'What strikes me about the duchess is this,' says Mrs. Wemyss, 'that she makes me feel myself unreal. I am not Cecily Wemyss to her, but only a Violet Melrose or a Betsy, as the case may be. It is fatiguing, and productive of a sort of waking nightmare ; to go through life as a perpetual and actual Betsy would be more than weak woman could endure. I wonder what she is going to do with us when she gets us to the castle ?'

'I anticipate the worst,' says Bruno, gloomily. 'Dick treats the whole thing as an immense joke ; but I fear he will find himself in the wrong box.'

'Oh, there won't be any boxes !' exclaims Sir Chicksy, kindly, who has just joined them. 'Just a sort of small theatre, you know, and quite a plain stage.'

'"*A clear stage and no favour,*"' quotes Mr. Vyner sadly. 'What an awful thought ! I was thinking of having a few humble friends to applaud me and throw me one or two hundred bouquets at a guinea apiece ; but I suppose, from what Chaucer has just said, it would not be allowed. Bless me, in what a tyrannical age we live !'

'"*Compelled to act against our will,*"' begins Bruno.

'Not against mine,' interrupts Dolores, quickly. 'Do you know I am quite delighted with the prospect of these private theatricals at the castle ; though I'm sure I can't act a bit, never having even tried. You all seem sorry ; but, as for me, I think it will be the greatest fun.'

For a moment it occurs to Mrs. Wemyss that the little dove-eyed girl before her may be wickedly satirical ; then she repents her of the notion.

Vyner laughs aloud.

'I believe we all think just as you do,' he says, 'and would be miserably disappointed if anything were to arise to scatter

our hopes of making ourselves "fair names and famous" out of these coming plays. But confession is bitter to us, and we love to play at indifference.'

'As good practice for the coming mummeries,' says Audrey, contemptuously.

'Dolores, come here and give us some tea,' calls Miss Maturin, her voice coming to them from over the soft turf. Dolores, rising, goes to her.

With little deft slender fingers she pours out the tea, and smiles upon the many men who throng around her, only too anxious to be her Mercuries. And yet, through all her smiles and kindest glances, the pathetic strain is shown, the faint sadness of a hidden regret, the shadow of a vague disappointment. He had *said* he would come; she had not so much depended on the delicate tenderness of his look or tone as on his spoken promise; she had been quite *sure* of his coming, she had dwelt upon his evident passionate desire to be with her, when, in the mystic calmness of her own pretty room, she lay awake watching the widening of the morn. She had risen in glad expectation of what the full day would bring to her, and now—now it is eventide, and all her sweet beliefs have crumbled into unsightly ashes, and the light of her soft hope has grown so dull as to be almost unseen by her. A barren hope indeed, productive of nought but secret and painful blushes, born of a hurt self-love, and something perhaps deeper still.

And then—*all at once*, as it seems to her—he is here, is coming to her over the cool sweet grass. With glad quick eyes and eager step he comes to where she is sitting in her white gown, with a gracious smile upon her lips, and 'blown soft hair and bright;' her *pretty* hair; it seems to him like the aureola of a saint surrounding that pure and lovely face, as he draws nearer, nearer still, until he is at her side.

She, seeing him, has grown a little pale, and has turned a disdainful shoulder somewhat in his direction, and let her mobile lips take a sweet haughty curve that suits them somehow, but should not be there for him. Leaning back in her chair, she turns up her face in a fashion a degree kinder than usual to the young man bending over her with lover-like assiduity, as it seems to the approaching Bouverie.

He is a very good, harmless young man, as that sort goes, named Horrocks (though more generally known as 'Longcloth'), and has, indeed, nothing to do with this story beyond the fact

that at this moment he awakens in Mr. Bouverie's breast a hatred as wild as it is unreasoning. He is hanging over Dolores, he is gazing with apparent delight into her eyes; and she—*she* whom he, Bouverie, had believed above the trivial cruelties of her sex—is smiling back at him as sweetly as though he was the male unit in the universe.

Paler and paler grows Dolores as she hears the approaching footstep; and yet it is with the calmest air in the world, and with the prettiest indifference, she acknowledges his greeting—which now has grown somewhat constrained—and puts her hand in his.

'Another cup of tea?' she asks, lazily, as though not clear as to whether she had given him one a moment since or not, and is therefore somewhat surprised at his fresh 'How d'ye do?'

'I have not had one yet,' returns he, rather taken aback by this unexpected question.

'No? What a shame! But I dare say you don't care about it. Men only pretend to like tea, it seems to me. And yet'—drawing up her brows reflectively, the little hypocrite—'I *did* think I gave you some just now.'

'You gave me nothing,' replies he, coldly; 'not even a welcome,' he could have added.

'It must have been to your brother then.'

'Very possibly,' says Bouverie, white with indignant disappointment, 'as I have only just now come.'

'Ah! so!' she says, as though slowly awakening to a possible fact, '*now* you have come, then? *now* when the others are all leaving? It was scarcely worth your while, was it? Sugar?' she smiles quite kindly—abominably kindly—at him as she says all this.

'No, thank you. Nothing—not even the tea. But you are wrong; it *was* worth my while to come. I have learned within the last few minutes the meaning of that strange word "mutability." The others are going, you say? Being only one among the many, I suppose I must go too?'

'Oh, no!'—with gracious indifference. 'Not until it quite suits you.'

'This very moment will suit me admirably.'

'Now here, now gone,' says she, with a little pale smile 'Well, don't let *me* detain you.'

'I never dreamed you would so far trouble yourself, that would be too much to expect. To be allowed to come was the greatest grace to which I aspired.'

'Humility is somebody's darling sin,' murmurs she, with a fine contempt and a flash from her large eyes. 'That grace you coveted and gained might have enabled you to come here sooner.'

'I think I came too soon!' retorts he, with sudden vehemence, the colour springing to his face. 'I wish the road to Horton had been twice as long.'

'To Horton!' It is her turn to change colour now; the blood recedes a little from her lips and brow. 'Were you to Horton and back to-day?'

'Yes,' shortly.

'It is thirty miles; but'—with sudden hope—'of course you went by train.'

'Unfortunately,' says he, smiling politely but coldly, 'the train didn't suit. It was important I should see our man of business before the post went out in Horton, and no train from that would bring me home before eight o'clock.'

'And wouldn't that have done?' asks Dolores, anxiously.

'It would, I suppose; but I didn't think so then—not when I was riding there and back, I mean. The only thought that possessed me during those thirty miles was that I could not well present myself to—to Miss Maturin at eight o'clock.' He pauses, and looks at the sky with a rather barren admiration. 'What a charming day you have had for the reception of your friends!' he says, indifferently.

She gives him to understand she agrees with him by a little movement of her head; but she says nothing, and stands before him trifling nervously with a spray of stephanotis; her lids are lowered. How can he tell, then, that her eyes are full of tears?

'You have quite got over last night's fatigue, I hope?' he goes on, cruelly conventional because so sad at heart. Is it possible that he should now think of tender things to say to this girl to whom last night he gave his heart only to have it trodden on to-day? He is unconsciously cruel—needlessly miserable.

'Quite, thank you,' she says, slowly; and then she turns away from him, and walks, with a sudden vague longing for comfort, to where Miss Maturin is standing at a little distance. Her eyes are dry again now, her head is uplifted, but her face is still pale, and her sensitive lips are touched with a shadowy pain. She had wronged him, that was only too true, she told herself; but how could she have known? He had been cold,



bitterly so, and had refused to see how grieved she was when her mistake had become known to her. He had talked to her in a strange unfriendly voice of the beauty of the day—how *could* he have felt the beauty of it just then?—and had ‘hoped she had forgotten last night’s fatigue,’ as might the commonest stranger! Had he forgotten, *quite*, that sweet last night, that now seems as though it had never been, and must for evermore be regarded as the mere gilded dream-child of an idle brain? And what was the meaning of that strange accusation he had brought against her—that charge of fickleness? Why should he tell her that she had taught him the signification of that sad word ‘mutability’? Well, it is all over now—all is at an end, if, indeed, one can speak of the end of anything that has had scarce a beginning. Perhaps he had not meant those few words last night; perhaps—and yet—Yes; it is all for the best, no doubt; but—*why* had he said those words?

With a secret sense of bitterest self-contempt, she casts a hurried glance to where she had left him standing. But he is not there—he is not, indeed, anywhere. And, with a little catch at her heart, she tells herself that she was right. All—what a little all, and how sweet it now seems!—is surely at an end between them!

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## CHAPTER VIII.

Thine eyes that are quiet, thine hands that are tender, thy lips that  
are loving,

Comfort and cool me as dew in the dawn of a moon like a dream.

\* \* \* \* \*

O my lord, O Love,  
I have laid my life at thy feet.

SWINBURNE.

ANOTHER day is added to the mass of buried ages. Already it is high noon. The world, grown weary of June’s jollity, is lying quiescent, lost in a languorous slumber.

Far overhead a tiny speck of quivering brown, grown mad with the mere ecstasy of living, is carolling aloud its fond praise of earth and its Creator. Down below a little dainty figure, clad all in white, and somewhat sad and somewhat dejected in its going, is wending its way through scented grasses and waving meadow.

Crowds of bees are giddy with clover,  
Crowds of grasshoppers skip at her feet,  
Crowds of larks at their matins hang over,  
Thanking the Lord for a life so sweet.

A hot and radiant sun is sitting up above, holding a stately revel. All the heavens are spotted with pale clouds edged with faintest amber, whose youthful beauty is made even more conspicuous because of the presence of one sad sister, draped all in mournful grey and tipped with gold, that hangs right over the clump of firs.

Dolores, glancing upwards at this forlorn little cloud, sighs resentfully, and tells herself that she resembles it; sad, despondent, angry! Alas for that sorry yesterday and all its attendant regrets! She clanches one small hand hastily, with a touch of softest self-disdain, and throws up her head impatiently.

All the morning depression had sat so persistently upon her, that at last it had seemed to her a good thing to bestir herself and go forth into the calm soft air, to see if that could not banish it. There is still a good deal of anger in her heart as she thinks of Mr. Bouverie (he had been 'Dick' for one sweet night and half a day, but now is 'Dick' no more). How eager he had been to accept her small mistake as a wilful incivility! How determinedly blind to her regret! Perhaps he had not noticed it—had thought her cold as himself! Well, a good thing too! But there is a pang at her heart as she tries to convince herself of this.

Behind the giant firs there is a little river, a brawling, noisy river that rushes headlong to the sea. It is a favourite of Dolores', and to it she turns her slow feet. The beauty of the day is lost upon her, the fair sweetness of the growing noontide and all its fuller lights and rich charms perfected, the faint sea-line upon the west, the delicate clearness of the hills, the misty light that floats tremulously low down between earth and sky, and the tender salt breath from the ocean that comes upward from the beach where the

Dark green waves are lying  
Foam-clad on the distant shore.

She has gathered a few dog-roses from the hedges, and put to them, in an idle, inconsequent fashion, some large marguerites that stare at her unblinkingly. With her white gown clinging to her and her great eyes fixed mournfully upon a

future dark as midnight, she reaches her destination, and throws herself upon the bank of her beloved river, at the root of a gnarled old oak. Lifting her hat from her pretty roughened hair, she lays it on the sward beside her, and, taking her knees into her embrace, prepares to give herself up to saddest thought.

But she is too young, too innocent for this sort of thing. Close to her is the happy turbulent stream, so full of conversation that perforce it carries her attention away with it ; and above her head the birds—fond little denizens of the branches round her—are calling to one another, and to her, in wild glad song that wakes the silence into life. Her thoughts wander ; the tears within her eyes, finding themselves forgotten, die an early death.

All the sounds of Nature combine together to rouse this fair thing from her sad musings. She cannot resist their influence. The vague perfumes, the mellow music, all sink into her soul. She is at unison with them ; her heart goes out to meet them. Truly this world is still full of great and generous promises although——

But what is this other sound that comes to her through the silken leaves ? It rises above all the rest, and comes even nearer, nearer, nearer. It moves her as all the others have failed to do ; it fills her with a sharp pain and a quick unrest. It is a voice.

Her colour deepens and then recedes again as she recognises it and knows it to belong to her *enemy* ! To such an awful depth in her esteem has she consigned Bouverie since that last fatal interview, now twenty-four hours old !

Evidently he is not in grief ! Yesterday's direful consequences have not afflicted him with that terrible malady called 'low spirits.' He is quite happy ! He is *singing* ! It would be impossible to describe the proper amount of indignation that consumes Dolores when the certainty is borne in upon her that he is actually trolling 'Nancy Lee' in a clear joyous baritone. If it had been 'Love Not,' or some such melancholy ditty, she might have forgiven it ; but 'Nancy Lee' !

She rises to her feet, and, as he turns the corner all unconsciously, to find himself face to face with her, she advances towards him a step or two.

'You !' says he, startled out of all more conventional addresses and letting the obnoxious 'Nancy' go to the winds.

'Yes—me !' returns she, icily, and not at all grammatically. But of what account is grammar when outraged self-love is at

hand? Her very acidity revives Bouverie and restores him to his usual calm.

'I beg your pardon,' he says, politely, pitching his cigar into the river. 'I fear I addressed you rather unceremoniously; but the fact is, I was so surprised to meet any one here that I forgot myself—not that any amount of surprise could be an excuse for ill-manners.'

'No,' says Dolores, indifferently. She is looking away from him—far down the little river to where the great sea lies basking in the sunshine—and has evidently developed an overpowering interest in a sea-gull that is flitting to and fro upon the tiny wavelets like a fleck of burnished silver. It is as though she has altogether forgotten Bouverie's presence.

He makes a movement as if to leave her, and half lifts his hat; then, as though against his will, pauses.

'Did you walk here?' he asks, in a tone he fondly but erroneously believes to be as indifferent as her own.

'Yes,' says Miss Lorne, in just the same uninterested fashion as before. Her shoulder is now a little turned in his direction.

'Through the meadows?' persists he, some acerbity in his manner.

'Yes,' replies she again. This is too much!

'Do you always speak in monosyllables?' demands he, wrathfully.

'You have known me long enough to be able to answer that question for yourself,' returns she, calmly.

'I see. Of course I must understand that—you wish me to leave you. But what have I done?' asks the young man, indignantly, 'that you won't even speak to me?'

'I have spoken to you,' says Dolores, coldly; but now there is a little something in her voice that does not exactly encourage or hold out hope to him, but yet gives him an excitement to pour out before her his pent-up grievance.

'Yes; but in what a way! How have I offended you? Was it such a crime, my being late yesterday? Or was it——' He stops abruptly and looks at her with miserable uncertainty in his eyes.

'Why should you believe I was offended yesterday?' asks she, suddenly. His question had touched her unpleasantly. A little anger flames into her eyes and deadens the sweetness of her lips. Was her disappointment then so palpable to everybody? She shrinks as if hurt.

'You are wrong,' she says, with a little catch in her breath.

'I suppose so. I hardly dared hope I was right. I should have known that your displeasure did not arise out of yesterday, but out of the night before. Those last words I said to you—I should not have said them; you had given me no right. If you mean me to understand that I must not repeat them'—his voice has grown somewhat husky. Closing his fingers more tightly upon the slight stick he is holding in both hands, it snaps in two; he flings the pieces far from him with an impatient jerk. 'I shall never trouble you in that way again,' he says, and turns, as if to continue his way through the wood.

'Do not go because of me,' says Dolores, in a low voice. 'I—— Auntie will be expecting me. I must go home at once.'

She is standing upon a little green mound, and as she speaks she steps down from it; in so doing, her foot comes upon a sharp piece of broken stone, which causes her such pain that involuntarily her foot turns under her. It is all the work of an instant. She lays her hand upon the trunk of the tree to keep herself from falling, and the very lowest faintest cry of agony escapes her; it is so faint as to be almost imperceptible; but

Lovers' eyes are sharp to see,  
And lovers' ears in hearing,

and Bouverie feels she has come to grief.

'You have hurt yourself,' he says, going anxiously up to her.'

'It is nothing,' returns she, still coldly, and with determined self-possession, though her lips have grown rather white. 'I assure you it is nothing.'

'It certainly is something,' says Bouverie, quietly, feeling sick at heart as he notices the pained lines round her sensitive mouth. 'You have hurt your foot. You must allow me to see you home.'

'There is really no reason why you should,' says Dolores. 'I beg you will give yourself no trouble on my account. See—I can walk very well.'

And, indeed, for one or two yards she manages to move alone; but then she falters, and a quick breath tells of increasing agony.

'You had better take my arm,' says Dick, coldly, but with passionately suppressed anxiety.

'No, thank you. I am sure I can get on by myself,' returns she; but, though she says it, she seems afraid to take the next step.

'What is the good of your persisting in this folly?' exclaims Bouverie, angrily. 'Do you want to be laid up for a month? Take my arm directly, or'—ungraciously—'shall I carry you? Perhaps it will be better——'

'No, no'—indignantly—'certainly not! I do not want your—any help at all.'

There are tears in her beautiful eyes, and not only her lips, but all her face is now quite colourless.

'Yes, you do,' says Dick, obstinately; and, coming close to her, he passes his arm round her. She makes no protest, but it is evident to him that she dislikes his support. Together, and in silence, they go on again for a little while; and then, seeing that she is still enduring great pain, he ventures on another protest.

'You *know* you are suffering horribly,' he says, with some vehemence. 'Why won't you let me carry you? It isn't such a very long way, and it will be so much better for you. *Do* try to understand'—savagely—'that I have no desire whatever to carry you for my own part—that I think you would be rather heavy than otherwise—but that I can't bear to see any creature in pain.' -

To this extremely rude exhortation she makes no reply beyond a faint effort to withdraw herself from his supporting arm, which he silently refuses to let her do.

Yet a few steps farther they go, and then all at once Dolores stands quite still upon the woodland path, and gazes at him with wide, agonised, almost imploring eyes.

'Oh, this is madness!' cries Bouverie, and in a moment, without further leave from her, he has her in his arms, and is carrying her with slow care in the direction of her home.

How light she is! What a frail burden! His heart smites him as he remembers how a moment since he alluded to her as being probably heavy. Would that she were indeed a little heavier than she is! Why there is scarce an air of heaven but would blow away this fragile creature! What a poor hold upon its life must this slender frame possess!

His heart is beating madly as he holds her to it, yet there is a set, angry expression upon his brow and a displeased curve about his lips. Only yesterday he would have deemed it bliss to be allowed to keep her hand unforbidden within his, yet,

now he has all her sweet body in his arms, no joy is his ! Her pretty head, crowned with its soft, short, sunny rings of hair, is lying upon his shoulder. Her face is very near to his. Oh, how hard a thing it seems that love alone should be far from him !

Once he ventured to look down upon her, to lift her head to a position a degree more comfortable ; but, as he does it, he feels that she stirs uneasily in his arms, and shrinks from him. This last mark of her aversion cuts him to the soul.

‘Is my very touch so hateful to you ?’ he asks, the more roughly because of his love and the misery he is enduring ; but she makes him no reply, and only turns her face against the sleeve of his coat, so that it is hidden from him.

What a cold, cruel child she is ! Can she not fathom his love ? Cannot the very greatness of it move her even to pity, that poorest of all consolations to a lover’s heart ? ‘So young and so untender !’ Great heavens, why was a heart given to him only to waste it on a girl who cares as much for him as —— Well, well, many men have known disappointments of this kind, and have lived through them ; but surely none so keen as his, for they have not known Dolores ! To endure is the lot of all ; but to be so deliberately spurned by a mere child !

Just at this moment a stifled sound breaks upon his ear, and he feels the little form in his arms quiver ; again that sorrowful sound, and then all at once he knows that she is crying.

Despair seizes upon him. Is he born only to distress and grieve this innocent creature ? He stands quite still, scarce knowing what to do, and feels that the arms that encircle her are trembling. Then very gently he places her upon the ground, still supporting her strongly so that her injured foot may come to no harm, and looks at her with anguish in his kindly eyes.

‘Oh, Dolores, what is this ?’ he says, with deep agitation. ‘Am I indeed so distasteful to you ? There, see—I have placed you on the ground again, and will help you as unobtrusively as I can until I get you home. Think of me as though I were only a stick or a stone, either of which,’ says Mr. Bouverie, with a sudden burst of misery, ‘I wish with all my soul I was, as then feeling would be dead within me. Why must my love bring me only a curse ? Oh, dear, dear heart, take pity on me and try at least not to hate me !’

His voice dies away from him, and he waits in a sort of nervous dread for the answer that may come. It is long in

coming, and the silence that follows upon his words grows more oppressive every moment. Oh ! earth so fresh and fair, have you no sound to break it ? Where are your minions ? The birds are hushed as if of one accord, their songs no longer sanctify the air, the soft gurgling of the river grows every moment fainter, lower ; as it passes mournfully by to the great ocean, it seems to him to murmur hopelessly, 'Dolores, Dolores !'

By an effort he rouses himself from the painful apathy into which he is falling.

'It is cruel to torment you so,' he says, wearily. 'If you must hate me, why, you must !' There is a touch of Oriental resignation about this last remark ; and, indeed, he has resigned himself to the worst ; but Dolores breaks the spell.

'Ah, it is just that,' she says, suddenly, with a quick sob, 'I cannot bear you to think it ! It isn't *true*. Hate you ? Oh, no, no !'

'If not that,' says Bouverie, in a strange tone, 'what ?' There is a lengthy pause, then,—

'Oh, Dick,' she murmurs, in an agonised tone, 'don't you think you could guess it ? I couldn't say it ; but—but——'

'Is it that you love me ?' says Bouverie. Even to himself his voice sounds changed ; he tries to put her back from him that he may see her face, but she resists him and hides it away from him upon his breast.

'Darling,' whispers he, in a low, impressive tone, 'is it my wife I hold ?'

There is a moment's cruellest suspense, into which no man may enter, and then,—

Two soft arms steal round his neck, and a little velvet cheek is laid against his—a delicate flushed cheek, all warm and wet with tears.

'Oh, Dick !' sighs she. 'Oh, dear, *dear* Dick !'

It is enough ! Upon the spot Bouverie's doubts desert him, and a certainty full of blessedness takes him into its keeping. How changed is all the world ! Overhead once more the birds have burst into a joyful pæan, the river, erstwhile dumb, is now loudly chanting a psalm full of marvellous delights. Not heaven itself could grant him a happiness more complete than *she* has conveyed to him in her fond faltering words.

\* \* \* \* \*

'But we mustn't forget your foot,' he says, presently. 'Does it hurt much now ?'



'It is better, ever so much better ; I really hardly feel it now. Isn't that odd ?' says Dolores, opening her eyes in a bewitching fashion. 'There isn't half the pain in it that there was before'—with a sweet little blush—'before we were—friends.'

'Lovers,' says Dick.

'Yes, lovers,' admits she, with unmistakable delight. 'Do you know, I think, when one is miserable in mind one feels one's body more ? I fancy I am almost well now ; see——'

She places her foot bravely on the ground, and takes a step forward with quite an undaunted front. It is only one step, and it leaves her when completed somewhat flushed, and with a tiny wrinkle on her brow.

'Ah, it does ache still !' she says, with deep disappointment. 'You are not so good a doctor after all ; it burns like fire ; I think perhaps if I had my shoe off—eh ?'

'Come down to the river and let me bathe it for you,' says Dick. 'When it is cooler, it will feel better ; and I dare say the shoe is pinching it now.'

'It must be then because the foot is swelled,' says Miss Lorne, glancing at her perfect feet and her Parisian shoes, with their wonderful heels, with a very pardonable pride, 'because I *assure* you'—with extreme earnestness—'these shoes are quite too large for me ; I can step into them without a shoe-horn !'

'Of course you can ; they are disgracefully loose,' says Dick, who is fast developing into an unimpeachable courtier. 'And what little shoes they are ! Why, they would be too small for a baby !'

'They *are* small, aren't they ?' she says, with a burst of irrepressible pleasure. Then she looks ashamed of herself and lowers her head. 'Auntie says my mother had little feet,' she murmurs shyly, almost apologetically. There is something wonderfully loveable about the faint touches of diffidence that betray themselves in her now and then.

'Talking of Miss Maturin,' says Dick, 'what will she say to me as a nephew—eh ?'

'All that is good,' declares Dolores, with settled conviction. 'She'—naively—'she will be *delighted* with you. It was only last evening that she was running you up to the very skies, and calling you all sorts of pretty names.'

'And you—how did you answer her ?'

'Ah!' murmurs she, with a little coquettish grimace. 'You must remember that last night I hated you. No name I could have invented would have been bad enough for you. But help me down to the river now, and see what can be done for me. Let us try the cold-water cure before we throw ourselves on auntie's mercies and frighten her to death.'

The river is but six or seven yards away from them. Having been carefully carried to it, Miss Lorne scats herself upon the bank, and desiring her companion to turn his head away, proceeds to divest herself of stocking and shoe. It hurts her more than she imagines it would do, and at the close of the operation she says,—

'Ach!'—with a little sigh of relief. This vague remark brings him to her side again in no time.

Filling his hat with water, he proceeds to bathe the pretty naked foot with all the gentleness of a woman.

'Is it easier now?' he asks, presently.

'The fierce heat has gone out of it. Yes, it is a great deal easier. Watch my shoe, or it will fall into the river.'

He rescues it from its impending grave, and then turns it over and over in his hands admiringly.

'What high heels,' he says, laughingly. 'They must add quite two cubits to your stature. Why, if they were taken off, you would be nowhere.'

He says all this most lovingly; but at his words her face clouds. She sighs faintly, and plays with the ribbons on her gown.

'Dick,' she says at last nervously, 'would you love me better if I were taller? It isn't a good thing to be so very small, is it? Perhaps you like great—that is—what they call "*fine*" women—do you?'

She pauses, and leans towards him, very deep anxiety in her lustrous eyes.

'May heaven in its mercy defend me from all such!' says Dick, piously. 'If there is one thing on earth I loathe, it is a fleshy woman.'

'Ah, so do I!' laughs she, delightedly, slipping her arm once more round his neck. 'You can't think what a relief it is to me to know that you agree with me on that point. *Poor big women*'—with growing pity—'they are always in the way, aren't they? And muslins and cambrics are so impossible to them. It is very sad for them, I think, because, after all, they can't help growing, you know, can they?'

'I'm very much obliged to *you* for helping it, at all events,' says Bouverie, 'though, when we come to think of it, we are only talking the most excessive nonsense. Were you taller than the most gigantic Amazon ever grown, with that angel face of yours, I should still adore you, and hold you in my heart higher than all the world.'

There is a passion in his manner that subdues her and pales her pretty cheeks.

'Dolores,' he goes on quickly, some of the old fear waking in him, 'are you sure you have no misgiving—none? No uncertainty in your heart about your love for me? Think—in pity to us both, my beloved—think of this *now* whilst yet there is time. Time!'—he rises to his feet, and puts her back from him. 'Already there is *no* time,' he says. 'My very soul is yours from this day forth, to ruin or to save.'

'Ah!' whispers she, softly, great tears springing to her eyes. 'If you could only know how I felt yesterday, when I believed you—you did not care for me, you would let no such cruel doubts rise within you! Come back to me, Dick! Do not stand over there as if you hated me. Come'—holding out her arms—'*come at once*. You know'—with a reproachful glance at her foot—'I cannot go to you.'

'It seems all too good to believe,' says Dick, lifting her slender hand and kissing the fingers one by one. 'Sweetheart! *whose* happiness is as great as mine?'

At this the smile returns to her lips; but still there is a faint regret within her eyes. She bends towards him.

'Was I very bad to you a while ago?' she whispers. 'Was I very cross to you, my poor boy? What did I say then? What cruel words did I use? Scold me for them. And yet, no, my punishment lay in the uttering of them! They vexed me even more than they vexed you. Dick, you *did* mean it then, after all.'

'What, darling?'

'What you said to me the night of your mother's ball, just as I was leaving. About'—she pauses, and turns a button of his coat round and round between her fingers in a nervous, confused fashion.

'About what, then?'

He remembers perfectly, but cannot resist the longing to hear what she will say.

'About holding me in your heart,' she whispers, so low

that he has to stoop to hear her. Yet she lifts her head as she says it, and smiles tremulously, though he can see that tears stand thick within her eyes. 'You did mean it?'

'Oh that I could tell you all I mean!' exclaims he, with passionate fondness. 'Dolores, why are there tears in your eyes?'

'Because of my joy,' murmurs she, sweetly. Then she puts her hand upon his breast and looks at him curiously. 'Are you glad?' she asks.

'Glad!' says Dick.

'Ah, so am I! Yesterday I was so afraid I had lost you for ever, and now to-day you are mine; an hour ago, and all things looked so dull, so colourless, that it seemed to me—dreamily—as if it wasn't much use to be alive! But now—with a quick change of colour and a radiant smile—all that is at an end;—Dick, shall I tell auntie all about—about you and me?'

'Of course,' says Dick, with animation. 'The sooner the better. All the world should be told, and at once. The moment I reach home I shall tell my mother.'

Dolores shrinks from him.

'Oh, no; not yet,—not quite yet!' she says, growing very pale. 'Do not tell your mother yet!'

'But why not, my dearest? How you change colour! Surely you are not afraid of my mother?'

'No, no!'—hastily; then, with a sudden shamefaced truthfulness and an adorable downward motion of the head, 'It is true though; I *am* afraid of her.'

'But, darling, how absurd! Why, she will be very proud when she finds what a sweet daughter-in-law I am going to give her!'

'Oh, it isn't that!' says Dolores, with a sudden faint flush and a touch of dignity that sits very charmingly upon her and endears her to him the more. 'I do not dream that she will object to me; but there is something about her—I cannot explain it; but——' she pauses, and a little curious light comes into her eyes—'I am sure she will do me harm yet!' she says, slowly. '*She* will be the one to destroy my happiness—to——' Again she pauses. She has grown deadly white, and now she raises one hand to her head in a terrified fashion—the pupils of her large eyes have dilated nervously.

'Dolores, what are you saying?' exclaims Bouverie, shocked by her expression. Taking down her uplifted hand, he holds

it closely in his own. His touch seems to soothe her. She sighs painfully, and then all at once the frightened look vanishes, and a smile, sweet, but languid, returns to her lips.

'I have been talking nonsense,' she says, with an attempt at lightness. 'But still, do you know,—looking at him with a pathetic meaning—'I feel very heavy at heart. Do not tell your mother, Dick, for *my* sake! Will not our love be all the sweeter if but known to us two alone?' She creeps closer to him, and lays her cheek coaxingly in a childish fashion against his. 'Let our secret be a secret for a little while. Only auntie need know—and, after all, auntie is one with us.'

'It shall be all exactly as you wish,' says Dick, caressing her. 'But my father? He, at least, might know. He will not betray us; and he is very dear to me. Do not forbid him to be a sharer in my joy.'

'Our joy,' she says, tenderly. 'Yes, tell him. But do not let your mother know for a while.'

'We'll make it an elopement case, if you like, and then she need never know of our engagement at all,' returns Bouverie, laughing.

His change of manner seems to reassure her and rouse her from her vague fears.

'You grow frivolous!' she says, austere. 'It is time, evidently, to think of home.'

'But how is your foot now?'

'Really better this time.'

'Well, let me bathe it once more, and then we will think of rising up and going on our way.'

Again the unfortunate hat, now in a limp and wretched state, is plunged into the flowing river. Again her little foot is tenderly bathed by the most loving hands in the world. When he has dried it with his pocket-handkerchief, very carefully, lest he should hurt it, he stoops and imprints a kiss upon the snowy arch of the instep.

'Darling foot! My *own* foot!' he whispers to it very low.

Miss Lorne draws it away from him with a pretty pretence at petulance.

'If you love my foot more than me, I shall be jealous of it and lead it a bad life,' she says, with a soft blush. 'But'—starting anxiously—'we really must go now! I think'—with some embarrassment—'if you were to go and sit just over there, on that big stone—see it?—with your back to me, I could manage to get on my—my—shoe again.'

'Get on your stocking,' says Mr. Bouverie, who scorns subterfuge; 'but never mind the shoe—it will only hurt you.'

'Go and sit where I tell you,' says Miss Lorne, with sudden dignity, very properly taking no notice of his advice. 'And be sure you don't turn your head until I give you leave.'

She manages to get on the shoe in spite of him, but the walk home is a slow one, and rather painful. However, she will not allow him to come with her farther than the wicket-gate that leads to the shrubberies and from thence to the house.

'Why can't I come on with you now and tell Miss Maturin all about it?' asks Dick, who cannot bear to picture her limping all alone to the house. He lingers hopefully, hanging on to the top bar of the gate, as though loth to let her go.

'No; it will be a little shock to her, and I would rather tell her myself. But don't be afraid of that'—sweetly; 'I know she will be pleased; only—I have been her baby, you see, for so long that she will hate to—to *divide* me with another. Do you know, Dick'—turning to him thoughtfully in the calm twilight, and uplifting her lucent eyes to his—'I was going to say to part with me; but you would never try to part auntie and me, would you?'

'I would not, indeed,' says Dick, very earnestly.

'Good-bye now, until to-morrow.'

She stands on tip-toe and slips her arms round his neck, and holds up her face to his without a suspicion of *mauvaise honte* and kisses him with all the passionate warmth of a loving child.

Then she turns away and goes slowly down the path that leads her from him. Slowly always, but presently more slowly still, until at last she comes to a dead stop.

All this he notes, leaning still upon the little rustic gate, and watching her every movement with a jealous care.

When she does come to a standstill, she looks round, and after a short hesitation comes back to him and is once again received within his willing arms.

'I have come back,' she says, laughing rather shyly, and very much out of breath from her exertion, 'because I felt sure you were feeling lonely without me. I knew that, because'—she laughs again here rather confusedly, and refuses to let her eyes meet his—'because'—softly—'I felt so awfully lonely without you!'

'My little sweet soul!' says Dick.

'Before I go—for really, this time,' whispers she, smooth-

ing the short hair from his temples with nervous loving fingers—*'say—say it all over again!'*

'I love, love, *love* you,' whispers he back, straining her to his heart, with a true lover's instinct guessing the answer to her vague request. There is something akin to thankfulness within his heart, as he holds her in his arms and looks into her beautiful earnest eyes, and knows the power of the pure love for her that has reached a perfect growth within his heart.

As for her, tremulous tears have risen within her eyes, and, though her smile still lingers, it is now graver, more tender.

'I love you too,' she says, in a low voice, 'and shall, for ever and ever!'

There is something that is almost solemn in her glance as she withdraws herself from his embrace and once more moves away. At the corner, she turns and waves to him a last adieu.

Nothing is left him now but the pale far-off shimmer of her white gown as it gleams here and there through the trees, lit by the early summer moon that is already sailing tranquilly through the pale blue ether up above. With an almost absurd anxiety he watches the white robe appear and disappear. Now it is here—now gone—now is come again, and now indeed is altogether lost! But all is not lost with it! Hope remains, and love, and the memory of her.

My love, mine own soul's heart, more dear  
Than mine own soul  
Who hath my being between the hands of her.

A star has come out in the heavens, one pale tranquil thing, above in the vast dome. To Dolores, his heart's queen, he likens it, as he takes his homeward way.

## CHAPTER IX.

Love lay upon her eyes.

There is no woman living that draws breath  
So sad as I, though all things sadden her.

SWINBURNE.

SLOWLY, a little reluctantly, Mr. Bouverie's love makes her progress to the house. She tries to believe she is in mad haste to tell her tale, yet welcomes gladly any delay that kindly Nature offers her. Impedimenta of a manufactured sort obstruct her way. Here she stops beside a flower-bed to pluck a glowing 'Anna Boleyn,' and beheads it, like its mournful namesake, under a mistaken impression that she wants it to make more sweet her room ; and here she lingers to hearken to the singing of some sleepy bird, trying earnestly—oh, cruel child !—to believe it a cry of pain. And anon she stoops to lift a tiny beetle crossing the gravelled pathway, to lay it tenderly upon the scented grass and speed it kindly homewards. Yet this last simple action only makes for her a life-long enemy. That beetle sorely resents her interference, being well on his homeward way already, when in an evil hour she met him and placed him *how* many beetle miles backward on his journey no man knoweth !

All these delays are so many wily devices of hers to lengthen out her road and ward off for a season the impending interview. It had seemed so easy to say she would tell auntie all about it, but now that the time for telling draws so nigh it appears to her terribly hard. How is she to begin ? What words must she use ? What if her news should be unfavourably received ? For the first time it occurs to her that auntie is tremendously tall ! Yes, it will indeed be difficult to approach her. Oh, if she should laugh at her, and tell her she is a silly baby—too young a child to know what true love means ! What then ? 'The deluge,' says Miss Lorne to herself.

At the laurustinas her heart has first begun to fail her ; now that she is at the hall-door there is not left to her so much as one poor shred of courage. She mounts the stone steps, and, with her suffering 'Anna Boleyn' clasped to



suffocation in her little trembling hand, enters the open door and moves quickly up the grim old hall.

It is half-past six by the big clock—later than she had imagined. But lovers' hours are long, and a very few of them would go to the day were we to accept their calculation. By this time Lallie will be sitting in the drawing-room lost in her *Times*, or perhaps 'Belinda'—most probably indeed the latter.

Opening the door with all the outward seeming of a Cæsar, but with a quaking heart, she enters the room. Yes, auntie is here with her 'Belinda,' and the fat Skye, and the cat, and tea.

'You have come!' cries Miss Maturin, starting into life, and letting both 'Belinda' and the Skye slide from her with a little dull thud to the floor—treatment the Skye resents with numerous snuffles and a succession of spasmodic barks that threaten to choke him every moment and bring him to an untimely grave.

'How long you have been!—not long really, I suppose; but I am always fussy, you see, and of course I miss you. Foolish old women like me are sure to be troublesome. Come over here, darling, and have your tea.'

'I thought you would have finished your tea by this time.'

'Well, so I should if you had been with me; but I put it off as long as I could, waiting for you; then I grew greedy,' with a soft laugh, 'and told myself I must have it, or die!'

'Ah, why did you wait?' says Dolores. She draws nearer, and, kneeling down beside Miss Maturin, slips her arms round her waist. 'I have been unkind to you, Lallie,' she says, in remorseful accents. 'I should not have left you alone for such a long, long time.'

'Nonsense, my kitten! I have been as happy as possible. Conceited child! Do you then think I cannot live without you?'

'I do; because I know I could not live without you!' In her manner there is a subdued but tender rush of feeling. She draws her auntie's face down close to her and folds her in a warm embrace.

There is something so fervent in the kiss the girl bestows upon her that Miss Maturin is slightly but unconsciously awakened by it to the inevitable ending of this drama. She puts Dolores back from her, and gazes at her earnestly.

'How sweet you are looking!' she says, fondly, 'but a little pale, as it seems to me. Did your walk fatigue you?'

'Oh, no!'

'You enjoyed it?'

'Very, *very* much,' says Dolores, with unthinking force. Then she colours crimson beneath her aunt's scrutiny, and, rising to her feet, goes over to the window, where her features at least are beyond observation.

Sinking into the cushioned old-fashioned seat, she turns her face eastward and gazes dreamily upon the fast darkening landscape outside. Slowly the shades of gentle night are descending, spreading a filmy pall over earth and sea, through which the trembling moonbeams soon will make a way.

Mingled with the soft calm twilight is a tinge of melancholy—a birth of sorrow, plaintive, vague, shadowy, but felt! It mingles with the air and fills all the dusky corners of the rose-garden. There comes a moan from the ocean, and from the village—far, far away—the solemn tolling of a passing bell.

The living, the loving, the dying, all are mixed together in the strange phantasmagoria that we call life. From earth we spring to laugh or cry awhile—to sport in the lavish sunshine with mad mirth or mope disconsolate within the shade—and then, to earth we go! A birth—a questionable joy—a death! And there is more of the crying than the laughing!

Miss Maturin has taken up her knitting. The girl, with bent head and graceful white-robed figure, is pondering on the subtleties of life and death. A delicate fragrance of dying flowers comes from the pleasure without.

With a little sigh, Dolores raises her slender figure into a more upright position, and prepares herself for the moment that shall make a third person a participator in her sweet secret.

'Lallie!' she says, very slowly, and then pauses; she draws herself well within the shelter of the lace curtains, and waits guiltily for some encouragement to proceed.

'Well, darling?' asks Miss Maturin, placidly, picking up a dropped stitch.

'Were—were you ever in love, Lallie?'

Miss Maturin laughs, with a certain sense of amusement. As yet the truth is far from her.

'No, my dear—never,' she says, so promptly as to preclude all possibility of doubt.

Dolores seems disappointed.

'I thought perhaps—you have such a sweet sad expression that—that——'

'I had been disappointed in love, and was still pining for the refractory one?' supplies Miss Maturin, gaily. 'No, no; I never loved any man; I never felt that I should *like* to love any man. I suppose the confession will make me suffer horribly in your esteem; but the fact is, I had only two offers in all my life, so that my range of choice was not unlimited.'

'But those two?' says Dolores, who, being in love herself, feels of course soft-hearted and inclined to the belief that one of the two discarded ones must surely have been worthy of favour.

'As for them,' declares Miss Maturin, with quite youthful vivacity, 'why, I remember them as though it was only yesterday.'

'What—*both* of them?' asks Dolores, curiously, who would have thought it more romantic had one only been given a place in her memory.

'Yes, both,' says Miss Maturin, with disgraceful enjoyment in her recollection. 'Heavens! What a snuffy old man the first was! He might have been my grandfather then—my father even now. He hadn't a tooth in his venerable head, and his gold-headed stick was the only useful leg he possessed.'

'And the other?' asks Dolores; but there is only faint hope in her tone. Had there been any sweet sad recollection in her past, auntie could not have possibly answered her in that jubilant fashion.

'The other! Oh, dear me,' says Miss Maturin, laying her knitting down to idle upon her knees, and knitting her brows instead, 'when I think of that young man, I always wonder why it was he was allowed to go around alone without a keeper. It couldn't have been want of funds, as he was immensely rich, quite a millionaire, poor soul!'

'What was the matter with him?' asks Dolores, discarding the protection of the lace curtains in her anxiety to hear the true and unvarnished tale of this sad wooer. 'Was he——'

'Yes, he was,' says Miss Maturin, agreeably—'*quite* mad! He was about the very worst lunatic any one ever saw out of an asylum. If he had just been one shade nearer perfection in his own line of business he would have made intimate acquaintance with Colney Hatch; but no such luck was mine; he remained a *harmless* imbecile just to torment me.'

With an injured shake of her handsome head, Miss Maturin resumes her stocking.

The girl's gaze still wanders dreamily outwards.

'What an evening it is!' she says at last in a low voice, full of intensest admiration. 'See how those pale clouds have dropped, as it were, into the very heart of the ocean! What a perfect mingling! What a clear calm light! Look at that opalescent bar over there.'

'A fair evening indeed,' agrees Miss Maturin, gazing at the far-off horizon with a deep satisfaction. 'A most exquisite mingling. A very "bridal of the earth and sky."'

'A bridal?' repeats Dolores, softly, flushing a delicate pink. 'Shall I ever be a bride, auntie? Do you ever think that some day perhaps I shall?'

'A *bride*? No, no, it is impossible!' exclaims Miss Maturin, with sudden curious vehemence. She looks askance at her niece, and a quick pallor overspreads her face. One might almost imagine that it was terror itself had blanched it. She sighs heavily, and sinks back in her chair, as one might who has been touched and scorched by a breath of passing fear.

'Why, auntie!' says Dolores, gazing at her with large, startled eyes. 'What is it you say?' Then timidly, 'Why should it be impossible? Other girls get married.'

'Ay, *other* girls!' says Miss Maturin, in a low voice akin to a groan. She seems to have lost all her self-control, and the words fall from her as though in despite of her will.

'Am I, then, different from all the rest?' questions Dolores, with a smile. It is a rather wistful smile. What if Lallie will disapprove of her engagement and look coldly on her Dick?

'Why should you imagine that?' says Miss Maturin, hastily. 'Tut, child! You must not mind me.' She is speaking more lightly now, and has evidently recovered in part her usual manner. 'Forget what I have said, or remember only that the very thought of parting with you causes me such pain that words slipped from me that—that were unmeant. To lose you now—after all these years!'

'We should not be parted,' says Dolores, gravely. 'Have I not just told you that I could not live without you? We two shall never part, Lallie, be sure of that.'

'Well, well, sweetheart, the subject grows too much for us, and we ourselves are needlessly thoughtful over a dream that may never be fulfilled. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."' Miss Maturin, as she says this, smiles faintly.

'Why should it be evil?' asks Dolores, regarding her earnestly—perhaps reproachfully. To call a marriage with Dick an 'evil'!

'Why, indeed?' says Miss Maturin, with an attempt at lightness. 'But tell me of your walk, darling child. Where did you go? Whom did you meet? Nobody, I fear, in this quiet neighbourhood. Sometimes I am afraid you will learn what loneliness really means during your solitary rambles.'

'I was not solitary to-day,' says Dolores. 'I did meet somebody.'

Her pale cheeks glow and her sensitive mouth trembles as she makes this confession. But to deceive Lallie in any way would be not only abhorrent to her, but, indeed—to do her sweet nature full justice—utterly impossible.

'I met—Mr. Bouverie.' She had almost said 'Dick,' and now feels remorseful at heart, and as though she has in some way been unkind to her lover by the use of his more formal appellation.

'I am glad of that,' returns Miss Maturin, unsuspectingly. 'I like that young man; he is so bright, so natural. Did you meet him soon after you left me?'

'As I got down to the river, he came there too,' says Dolores, leaning eagerly forward and speaking with glad interest. Her beautiful eyes are sparkling; she has found a mine of happiness in those words—'I like that young man?' Yes, yes, she knew it! Who could *help* liking him? 'He stayed there with me all the time,' she goes on, nervously, 'until I said I should come home; and then he walked back with me, and he wanted to come in and see you; but——'

Her voice dies away. How difficult a thing it is to declare aloud the first love of one's heart!

Miss Maturin makes no reply. She is feeling numbed and sick at heart. Whatever cruel thing is gnawing at her heart is doing its work effectually; the girl's last words are working into her brain. 'Three long hours,' she says to herself, 'three long hours!' An expression of sickening anxiety grows upon her white face, and there is, too, a strange, mournful, despairing look about her as she glances furtively at the pretty dainty figure in the window, sitting with calm folded hands and with a light as of heaven within her happy eyes.

'Lallie,' says Dolores, after a lengthened pause, 'do you think that people, who have never been in love themselves, can sympathize with or understand those who—who *do* love?'

Greyer and greyer grows Miss Maturin's face. Reluctantly she compels herself to gaze upon the girl's flushed, averted features, and then a great change sweeps over her. First

there is passionate regret, and then desolation, and then despair.

But she masters herself! Love, the all-powerful, helps her to do this; for the girl must never know. It is a wonderful mastery over self, however, and proves the strength of the soul within her; but it tears her heart in twain. Her lips are bloodless; yet she forces a smile to them as she turns boldly and answers the girl, who is the one sole thing she clings to upon earth.

'I do indeed,' she says, quietly. Alas for the cruel strain that gives this calm! 'Do you mean that I could not sympathize with—let us say—you in such a case?' She pauses for a moment and then goes on again: 'And so you are in love, child?'

She has risen from her seat, and Dolores has risen too.

'Oh, Lallie—oh, dear, *dear* Lallie!' cries the girl, tremulously, turning a face, now pale as a new-born snowdrop, to Miss Maturin. She makes a step forward and holds out her arms. 'Ah, love me still!' she cries, a little incoherently perhaps, but with an intuitive fear that Miss Maturin might think herself forgotten, neglected, thrust from the first place in her tender heart. Almost it seems to her that she—*she*—has been the one to inflict a lasting injury upon the faithful soul who has been to her all that her lost mother possibly could be.

'It is so, then,' says Miss Maturin. She has the frail little figure in a close embrace by this time, and is bending over it in speechless grief—a grief unknown, unguessed by Dolores. 'I am "dear Lallie;" and *he* is "dearest Dick" for the future—is not that it?'

There is no answer—only the soft arms cling to her and the pretty rings of hair stir uneasily upon her breast.

'How did you know it was Dick?' comes a little whisper to her presently.

'Have I no eyes in my head? And yet — No; I knew nothing until five minutes ago; your manner told me. Well, I am content to take second place—at least, I *am* second—is it not?'

'No,' says Dolores, firmly, throwing back her head and looking earnestly at her aunt, 'not that! These two loves I hold now within my heart are so different, yet both so great, that I could not make one second to the other. He is first in

his, you are first in yours ; you shall never be second, my own Lallie !'

'Fond little heart !' says Miss Maturin, pressing the sunny head down once again upon her breast. She is, after all, happier when the child's innocent eyes are not looking into hers. 'And so you love him well ?' she says.

'And he loves me Is it not all quite wonderful ?' She passes over her aunt's question as though it requires no answer, which in truth it does not. 'He wanted to tell his mother about—about it all ; but I said only you should know of it just yet ; there is plenty of time to——'

'Yes, yes—time, *time* !' says Miss Maturin, with agitation. 'That is the principal thing. Let us keep it a secret between us three as long as we can : it—it will be so much happier for you—for us all—no one prying or asking questions—or—— Yes, let it be *quite* a secret !' She ceases, and laughs almost hysterically. 'Don't you see,' she says, nervously, 'how much better it would be ?'

'So I said,' murmurs Dolores, eagerly. 'It seems even sweeter—our love I mean,—shyly—'when only you and I and Dick know of it ; you—you are pleased about it, auntie ?'

'I have but one thought about it, and that is what is best for your happiness.'

'Dick is best,' returns she, with a coy little laugh. 'Don't you think so, Lallie ?'

'I suppose so, darling.'

'Why don't you say something nice about him, then ? Is he not the best and dearest fellow in all the world ? Is he not handsome ?'

'Not so handsome as his brother.'

'As Bruno ? Oh, auntie ! What on earth are you thinking about ? Dick not handsomer than Bruno ! Why, they are not to be compared in the same breath ; just look at Dick's eyes !'

She pauses, as though waiting for Miss Maturin to perform this feat, which, as Mr. Bouverie at the present moment is five miles away, would be a difficult one. Miss Lorne's next remark, however, would lead the unwary to believe that it has been performed.

'Now I hope you see how wrong you were,' she says, with a triumph in voice and eyes. 'Why, Bruno isn't fit to be named in the same day with him ! Say you love Dick, Lallie, or I can't be quite happy.'

'I think he is the most charming young man I know. He is the one I would have chosen for you,' says poor Miss Maturin, driven to say this with a sinking heart. Then, the tension she has laid upon herself becoming too strong to be longer borne, she gives way a little.

'Go, Dolores, go!' she cries, faintly. 'Go to your room.' A passionate longing to be alone is consuming her. She speaks with a studied coldness that is but a remnant of the departing calm. Then, seeing her darling's grieved surprise at the unwonted severity of her tone, she once more nerves herself.

'Go, my beloved,' she says, tenderly; 'it is late. You have not dressed yourself, and dinner will soon be ready. We can discuss your great news later on.'

Dolores silently obeys her; but when she gets to the door, almost as she touches the handle of it, some thought strikes her. She wavers, turns, and finally, running back again, flings her arms round Miss Maturin's neck.

'You know I love you, Lallie, don't you? You are not jealous of him? You are not lonely, or sorry, or—or *anything*, are you? That would break my heart. You feel quite *sure* of my love?'

'I do, my dearest child!' Her voice is low and broken with emotion.

'That is what I am to you—your child?'

'My own child! Truly I feel towards you more as a mother than an aunt.'

'And I am sure,' says Dolores, softly, 'that, could my mother be given back to me now, I should never learn to love her as I love you.'

When the door has closed behind Dolores, and she is indeed gone—when the very last echo of her light footfall has ceased upon the polished boards beyond—a change comes over Miss Maturin.

Her hands fall to her sides, her face grows ashen. All in one pitifully-short moment she seems to have become an old woman. Despair shines dully within her eyes, and gives a desolate curve to her lips. Despair, too, is in her heart, and a terror that has long lain dormant—the fear of *discovery*!

To possess a secret—a sinless one so far as she herself and the creature she loves best on earth are concerned—has been Miss Maturin's doom—a cruel secret that has touched her, though from without—and burned into her and made her life for many years a burden almost too great to be borne.



Oh, the days and the long sleepless nights of anguish, and the years of bitter grief, filled to overflowing with a vain regret! There had been, too, wild moments in which passionate anger made havoc of her strength, and in which prevailed a longing for revenge, never to be fulfilled. And then had come calm and a strange new love exceeding all that had gone before it, born of the clinging arms and the innocent kisses of a little child who had wound herself round her heartstrings, and in process of years had grown into—Dolores! A child with sad eyes as a heritage, and a sensitive mouth, and a beauty exceeding that of most, and a spirit too great for her frail body. Pure, tender, loving, possessed of a heart that had learned 'that more excellent way,' and knew no guile, and a soul that truly thought no evil of any living thing, the child had grown into a girl touching upon the borders of womanhood.

As a little one, she had been gentle, and, for a child, wonderfully unselfish. As a girl, she is still more gentle, 'believing all things' that will help her to reverence her kind, and 'hoping all things' for them. A little reserved in manner, perhaps, because of her persistent isolation in her childhood from those of her own age, but, nevertheless, loving, calm, and restful in manner, and with an unknown, because untried, but terrible capacity for endurance.

O most sweet spirit, what place is there for you in this cold sneering world?

Miss Maturin, with a little indescribable gesture, rouses herself from her lethargy, and in an angry fashion—as though impatient of fate and its sad decrees—paces up and down the long drawing-room. Memory, glad and bitter, troubles her; but, above all, the girl's beautiful face and still more beautiful soul saddens her. 'Is there no grace? Is there no remedie?'

Dear Lord! how cruel seem Thy ways at times. And yet the unfailing records of countless ages teach us how sublime Thou art—how patient to Thy sinner, and how loving to Thy saint!

Miss Maturin, coming to a standstill by the lower window, gazes out absently upon the glories of the dying day. Are all her hopes to die as dies the sun, or is there still a promise for her in the thought that he will rise again to-morrow?

'Have pity upon me now, kind Heaven, in this my hour of need!' she whispers feverishly, bringing her palms together. 'Yet it is for *her* I pray—for *her*, not for myself. Spare her!

Let me be forgotten : but have her ever in merciful remembrance ! Let *me* suffer ; but save her !'

She raises one hand to her head in a distracted fashion. The agony of her mind is reflected upon her face, which is white and drawn.

'If he must be told—if all is to be opened up afresh—what am I to say—to do ? And she—ignorant, unknowing, it will kill her ! Alas, alas, my lamb, my innocent one !' A sob checks her. 'Why need he ever know ?' she murmurs, her pale lips growing still more pallid. 'Why not conceal it to the end, and trust to chance to befriend her ? Who is there here to betray us ? And yet if, at any time fate should throw in her path one who knew ?——But they are so few who know ! And once his wife she would be safe—even should the truth come out. But how about her mind ? Knowledge of that sort coming too late would destroy her—would break her loyal heart. No ; she could not endure the shame to *him* ! Oh,' stretching out her arms to the darkening heavens, 'how difficult is life ! With what torn and bleeding feet the pure must tread the world ! How can I help her—how ?'

Her head sinks upon her breast, and for a little time she remains lost in thought ; then she sighs wearily and sinks, as though overcome with bitter conclusions, into a lounging-chair.

'The truth—the truth is best !' she murmurs brokenly, 'He shall know the worse before he weds her. For her sake, I will run no risks. There shall be no after-discovery. To him I shall confide all ; but she shall never know ; I will not have her sweet life darkened ! But when he hears her story, how will it be with him then ? Will his love be strong enough to bear the strain ? If so, all will be well ; if not——' Her voice sinks, and a shadow coming from the gathering night falls athwart the room. 'If it must be, so be it !' she says at last faintly. 'For her sake, I shall bring myself even to the betrayal of my dead. After all'—wearily—'old griefs are never buried ; they come to us again and again when we believe ourselves free from them for ever. And yet I should have expected this. With her angel face some day it should be. Well, I shall speak when the right time comes ; but not yet—not yet !'

A clear voice ringing through the hall ; the refrain of a gay little French song echoing through the air ; the door thrown suddenly open.

‘Lallie—lazy Lallie! Here still?’ cries a ringing voice. ‘Come—come this instant and get yourself ready for dinner! I shall be your maid to-night. A fig for Elizabeth and her old-maidish ways! I alone have the power to make you as lovely as Nature intended you should be. Come—unless you want cook to cast maledictions upon your head!’

‘Go before me, darling,’ says Miss Maturin, in a low voice.

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## CHAPTER X.

Our souls in us were stirred and shifted  
By doubts and dreams and foiled desires.

A little laughter  
Is much more worth  
Than thus to measure  
The hour, the treasure,  
The pain, the pleasure,  
The death, the birth.

SWINBURNE.

THE village choir has mercifully ceased from troubling the congregation for the time being. The ancient and much dilapidated organ has sunk into a fitful slumber, out of which it awakens every now and then to give way to a dismal scream, as one after another the windy sobs die out of the wheezy pipes. These irreverent screams, coming at uncertain periods, have a distinctly demoralising effect upon the more youthful members of the choir, and reduce the school-children sitting demurely upon the forms below to such a low state of morality that it only requires one shriek more to bring their suppressed mirth to a head and cause a dangerous outbreak. Upon the elder members of the congregation, however, the result of these screams means simply depression.

The hot sun is rushing through the painted windows and casting bright patches of colour here and there—upon sober Quakerish bonnets that would scorn such finery if supplied by earth, but must needs bear it when sent from heaven direct—upon poor bald heads and heads most daintily tressed—upon the rich and poor, the sinner and the saint alike. Upon Dolores, sitting with clasped hands and a rapt angelic face, it casts a brilliant crimson flush that lights up her lovely eyes to greater

beauty, and throws rich stains upon her white gown, and is put to shame only by her soft, parted lips.

Sing, song, sing, song, goes the curate. His voice alone can be heard ; the *words* of the second lesson are nowhere.

Poor man ! may it be the lot of few of us to know such misery as his. His struggles, though small, are fierce ! Years ago Nature (unkind parent) removed his teeth. A month ago he besought Art to replace his loss, and to-day is wildly fighting with a set of brand-new molars that come persistently in his way and derange his syllables, upset his periods, make conundrums of his simplest sentences, and threaten at every moment to rush incontinently down his throat and choke him ! Bad as he was without his teeth in the years gone by, he is now *with* them infinitely worse !

As nobody is listening to him, however, all this makes little difference.

Lady Bouverie, in the square pew, is sitting therein in a scrupulously upright manner, with an expression upon her cold face that she fondly believes to be eminently pious, but which is only disagreeable. She is holding a Bible straight before her, and is gazing at it with a severity as forbidding as herself, and with an air meant to impress the congregation. She has mounted a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles upon her hawky nose, and is altogether very terrible in appearance. No doubt the congregation of the former type is impressed, and believes her honest in her seemingly eager perusal of the Holy Writ before her. But in reality she is only calmly pondering upon certain worldly concerns very dear to her.

With a comfortable complacency she dwells upon the certainty of the growing attachment that exists between her elder son and the pretty heiress of Greylands. There has been no official announcement of an engagement, no taking into confidence of the mother by the son ; but the former, for all that, is as cognisant of the love affair as if she had been the chosen recipient of his raptures. Dolores to Lady Bouverie is what the fly is to the spider, a thing to be caught and devoured. Money is Lady Bouverie's god, and money is distinctly plentiful with Dolores. But one thing, perhaps, would rank above it in the elder woman's affections, and that would be birth ; pride in her ancient lineage—older even than her husband's—runs through every fibre of her body. But of this too the little heiress can boast ; of good people all through

she comes, the Maturins being second to none in family, and counting as many generations as most.

That Dolores, pretty fly, should have so readily fallen into her web, or her arrangements, and that Dick should have followed suit, seems to his mother an unprecedented stroke of good luck. Nothing can exceed her amiability just at this time, or her excessive affability ; she seems indeed to have cultivated a temper serene and placid, to which, most assuredly, she was not born. She lavishes upon Dolores—who is a little bewildered by them—all the attentions and caresses of which she is capable. The attentions are simple, the caresses works of art.

Dolores's fortune, she has assured herself, is by many thousands greater than that of any other marriageable young lady in the county. Dolores, she admits, even to herself, is all that can be desired in manner and appearance. Her style is perfect, her taste unimpeachable. As a daughter-in-law, it will be quite possible to be absolutely proud of her. The girl's little, dainty, haughtily-set head can be seen by her as she turns her glance to the right, and looks at her from over the high oaken walls of the Bouverie pew that board her in on every side, and seem to add to her pomp by separating her so entirely from her fellow-creatures.

To-day the world is a week older than when Dolores and her lover stood by the rushing river and grew glad because of the fire of love that glowed within their eyes and burned so warmly in their hearts.

There had been a little change in Dick since that day, a change his mother had not been slow to mark—the glad abstraction in his face, his many reveries, the happy expectancy that betrayed itself each morning in his manner and spoke of the blessed certainty that soon he should be face to face again with *her* ; the restlessness that grew upon him with the evening when hope of seeing her failed him, until long dull hours should have passed away.

The god of love, ah, benedicite !

How mighty and how great a lord is he !

One should be dense indeed not to know when Dick Bouverie was in love.

Warmer and warmer grows the day, drowsy and drowsier grows the congregation. Audrey Ponsonby, with a little imperious gesture, bids Sir Chicksy Chaucer open the window nearest her an inch or two more. It is all it will open, and

no good comes to her from it, as winds are asleep to-day and breezes dead.

'You should bring a fan with you,' whispers her father to her, absently, yet in a tone of loving concern. 'A fan—eh?'

He is an elderly man, worn, white, with the orthodox stoop of a book worm. His likeness to his sister, Lady Bouverie, is very striking; but an observer studying both would have said she ought to be the man, he the woman. In fact, 'Dad,' is as mild and gentle and simple at heart as she is quite the reverse.

'I must remember it next time,' says Audrey, in a little soft whisper, turning upon him a smile that lights up all her supercilious face and softens it into great beauty. The fact that she possesses but one fan on earth, and that one only fit for evening use, she carefully hides from him. Where is he to find money for such frivolities as fans, when books, the food of his soul, are debarred him because of the emptiness of his purse?

In the pew opposite Audrey's, Mrs. Wemyss is leaning back gazing upon space. That Bruno Bouverie is gazing upon her is a fact of which she appears utterly unaware. Yet is she? There is something just a trifle too innocent about the droop of her pretty mouth.

The vicar's wife, Mrs. Dovedale, is sitting open-eyed, leaning a little forward, as though engrossed with the lesson, of which not one word is intelligible to her. Her friend Mrs. Drummond, being fat, forty, and unwieldy, is sighing heavily and inwardly anathematising the too eager Sol. Miss Maturin, in an exquisite toilette, is reading her Bible diligently. Mr. Vyner, in his own pew, somewhat distant from the rest, is apparently sound asleep.

But what is this discordant shriek that rouses him once more to terrified life? It is the choir—it is the choir—my soul! Again it has arisen to its many feet. Again the bilious young organist plies his sorry instrument with such a will that the very rafters tremble with the gruesome sound. It ascends heavenwards—(if heaven receives it, it is very kind!)—it finds an echo in every corner. It drowns the thoughts of all present. It drowns, indeed, *everything*, except alas! the choir. At present they are 'marching as to war,' and the shrillness of their battle cry is not to be surpassed! If earthly soldiers marched to Mr. Gladstone's wars with an ardour as vehement as is here displayed by spiritual ones, we need not

wonder at the extreme brilliancy of the conquests that have been achieved !

And now once again silence, save for the melancholy mumble of the curate. The vicar is absent to-day, taking the duty of some sick brother, so that the entire service devolves upon the toothless one he left behind him.

More and more sleepy grow the people, the sun more vigorous ; the whole church seems flushed with its yellow light ! Naught can now be heard but the response of the clerk as he helps the curate through the Commandments. Through all the heat and sunlight and general languor his voice comes lazily.

‘ And incline our hearts to skip this law ! ’ He is an old man, and better might be expected of him ; but this is undoubtedly what he says. His levity sits very badly upon him, and contrasts but ill with his hoar and reverend locks Can he *mean* it ?

And now comes the sermon. It may be a good one, it may be quite the other thing—who shall say ? Nobody hears it. Nobody *wants* to hear it, which is very satisfactory, as they couldn’t even if they would. The extreme heat has reduced most of those present to a state bordering upon insensibility. Even Dolores, with a swift inward sense of remorse, raises her delicately gloved hand to her lips to suppress a yawn. Two only of the whole assembly are thoroughly awake : Mrs. Dove-dale, who, in a saintly attitude and a great big Rubens hat, and with her half-childish, half-malicious smile upon her lips, is outwardly intent upon the sermon that no man can hear ; and Audrey Ponsonby, who, leaning back in her pew in an indolent fashion, with her great gloomy eyes wide open, is evidently lost in thought, of a character as scornful as it is sad with a vague regret.

‘ Lastly ’ has come ; the curate has mopped his brow twice ; the organ has wheezed afresh in anticipation of the last voluntary. Mr. Vyner has reached that point in his slumbers when a snore may confidently be expected, when providentially the ‘ Amen ’ is spoken, and all is at an end.

‘ What a delicious day ; but just a little too much of it ! ’ says Mrs. Wemyss, as every one crowds into the porch outside with an alacrity that betrays their joyfulness at their escape. ‘ I do hope you will all brave the heat, and come and rouse me up this afternoon, or I shall be bored to death. Sunday afternoons are always so oppressive.’

She smiles—nay, beams on every one ; she returns Bruno's warm hand-clasp with a pressure that leaves nothing to be desired. She is perfectly delightful even to Lady Bouverie, who is not quite as fond of her as she might be.

Yes ; most of those she addresses will be charmed to drop into her during the afternoon. It is her usual day of reception, and is generally well attended. Even Mrs. Drummond, who goes in for the heavier type of religion and always calls Sunday 'The Sabbath' in big letters, and makes that holiest of days a perfect curse and a cause of life-long regret to her household so far overcomes her prejudices as to go to Mrs. Wemyss's every Sunday between the services. But then Mrs. Wemyss is an 'honourable,' and that, according to Mrs. Drummond's lights, makes *such* a difference !

Mrs. Dovedale too is always to be seen there on Sunday afternoons, with her babyish bonnet or her big hat as the case may be, and her little curious smile, that means nothing or a great deal. So is every one else. After all, if you take notice of the fact, you will find that Sunday afternoon is the dull spot in one's weekly routine that all the world would scamp if they could. Chatting it away at Mrs. Wemyss's is as good a way of scamping it as most.

'So quite too good of you all to come,' says Mrs. Wemyss, rising from her garden chair about two hours later to greet Mrs. Drummond, and comprehending in her speech those who have already come. She alters her style to suit her guests at times, and therefore occasionally makes rather funny little speeches ; but this at least may well be said of her, that whatever she may choose to say at the moment always becomes her. She glances in a quick flickering fashion at Bruno Bouverie as she thus greets Mrs. Drummond, and there is something about the expression of her eyes suggestive of the idea that she could laugh were she to find herself suddenly alone. 'An hour ago,' she goes on smiling, and clicking her huge black fan with as good a grace as any Spanish señora, 'I feared no one would have the charity to break in upon my monotony, and *then* I felt suicidal.'

At this Mrs. Drummond regards it as her direct duty to enter a faint protest.

'But you had your books, surely,' she says, with a meandering smile, 'your *good* books—your De Quincy that I lent you, your Hall, your A'Beckett ?'

'I had,' responds Mrs. Wemyss, promptly. 'I had them



all in a row. I tried them every one in turn, and that I am convinced is why I felt so specially murderous this afternoon! Ah, Miss Maturin, this *is* a pleasure; and you too, dear Dolores! And—with a little mischievous smile—‘of course *you*, Mr. Bouverie.’ Her manner is altogether different now, and full of a tender gladness as she greets these last comers.

‘It takes but a simple intellect to see how it is with Dick,’ says Bruno, presently, when his hostess is once more seated in her garden chair—they are all out of doors on this most blessed afternoon, and he is, as usual, lounging at her feet.

‘Why, yes! He seems in excellent health,’ replies she, indifferently.

‘I’m not talking about his health,’ says Bruno, somewhat indignantly. ‘What I mean is that he’s quite gone in that quarter.’

He nods lightly to where Dolores is standing, the centre of a small group.

‘Gone?’ repeats Mrs. Wemyss, innocently. ‘Dear me, no, he isn’t over there at all; he is standing quite close to Audrey, on *this* side. See?’

‘How you amuse yourself!’ says Bruno, with a slight shrug and an amused glance. ‘What I want you to hear me say, then, is, that Dick is in love.’

‘Ah!’ exclaims Mrs. Wemyss, lifting her brows. ‘You should break your news more gently. In love? With whom?’

‘Miss Lorne, if you will have me put it into words. And she, as it seems to me, is quite as *empressee* about him. There is nothing to choose between them; she is quite as much in it as he is. Don’t you think they will make a charming pair?’

‘Ah! Now who would have believed them so silly?’ murmurs Mrs. Wemyss, in an accent replete with heartfelt regret.

‘Eh?’ says Bruno, who up to this had been almost enthusiastic in his speech. He raises himself upon his elbow and gazes at her earnestly.

‘So foolish of them!’ exclaims Mrs. Wemyss, biting her red lip with considerable force. ‘But it was to be expected. It is of course the way they *would* go. Nobody has a grain of sense now-a-days except myself and you. There—that’s polite of me, if you like. Have some strawberries?’

‘I don’t understand you,’ says Bruno, stiffly, refusing to be mollified even by the sweet smile she sends straight into his eyes. ‘Who is foolish, and why?’

'Your brother and that lovely child. Why you have just been telling me all about it!' returns she, with an assumption of reproach.

'I said nothing of folly, certainly; I only said they loved each other.'

'*Bien*, and how could you possibly have said it more distinctly?' A little rippling laugh breaks from her as she presses a strawberry into a mouth that is scarcely less red than it.

'Love, then, you deem folly?' asks the young man, half angrily.

'The very height of it, don't'—with a soft coquettish glance—'don't *you*!'

'No, I don't,' exclaims Bruno, indignantly, after which he gathers himself up from her feet and saunters moodily away in the direction of nobody. This way carries him into the gardens beyond; but it doesn't keep him there. It just gives him time to concentrate within his brain the fact that the most exquisite flowers in Christendom are altogether inferior to the society of Mrs. Wemyss. After the imbibing of which knowledge, like a very sensible young man, he returns once more to civilised life. Once more, too, he approaches Mrs. Wemyss, with a face wreathed in smiles, and sinks into his old seat beside her.

'The garden is pretty, isn't it?' says she, with light enthusiasm. 'I knew you would like it, I don't wonder you stayed there so long!' It is precisely five minutes and a half since he left her.

'Was I cross?' whispers Bruno, contritely. 'I'm a bear, I know, because you have so often told me so. But, you see, you upset all one's preconceived ideas so utterly that you upset one's temper too. I had been for so long dwelling upon the thought that there really was something out of the common sweet about Dick's love for Dolores that, when you crushed the sweetness, I was startled—no more.'

Mrs. Wemyss changes colour for an instant, then she is herself again.

'Ah! And so that was it?' she says, gaily, with a quick glance at him from under her rather roguish lids.

'Every bit of it.'

'What a temper you must have, then, to get into such a rage over another man's business. Now, if I had said anything that touched *yourself* at any point, or concerned you in any way—'

'I should not of course have lost my temper,' finishes Bruno, returning her gaze steadily for a full minute—only a minute, however. Then his eyes go down before hers. He sighs. 'You do with me what you will,' he says, in a low tone, reluctantly, and forthwith returns to his allegiance and the hem of her gown.

The word 'garden,' however, has fallen upon fertile soil. It has, in fact, dropped upon Miss Drummond, who, like the cockles, is for ever 'all alive, O!' She has made up the thing she is pleased to call her mind, to marry either Mr. Vyner or Sir Chicksy Chaucer, but rather leans towards the latter as being easier game and having a title to bestow. '*Lady Chaucer!*' how unique! how uncommon! how *antique!* She now turns towards the youthful baronet, who is as far gone in a dream about the back of Miss Ponsonby's little Grecian head as his intellect will permit.

'Gardens!' she says, ecstatically. 'I do so love flowers. Don't you, Sir Chicksy?'

'Eh?' says Sir Chicksy, rousing himself with considerable difficulty.

'Flowers, you know,' continues Miss Drummond, with a beaming smile that spreads her mouth—to which Nature has already been more than generous—to a positively alarming width. 'I hear dear Mrs. Wemyss's gardens are exceptionally fine. Will you'—almost fondly—'take me to see them?'

'He is done, by Jove!' whispers Mr. Vyner to Bruno at this moment, with a most unholy joy. But he isn't!

'I'd be awfully delighted to show 'em to you,' says the baronet, with an unmistakably kindly air; 'but, fact is, I must stay near Miss Ponsonby, you know, to fan her in case she should feel too warm. Hot day, you see, and she can't bear heat. Not so strong as you or me, you see! eh!' This in a confidential aside that plainly maddens Miss Drummond.

'Are you Miss Ponsonby's medical adviser?' she asks, with what she fatuously believes to be scathing sarcasm: 'If so, I congratulate her! But as I am not aware that I ever engaged you as family practitioner to the Drummonds, I am quite at a loss to understand how you have estimated Miss Ponsonby's strength (which to *me* seems almost masculine) to be so much less than mine.' Here follows a most disastrous attempt at a genial outburst of merriment.

Sir Chicksy appearing positively dumb-stricken by this

awful assumption of pleasantry, stares at her with an eye-glass and an open mouth, but says nothing.

'To the rescue!' whispers Mrs. Wemyss, good-naturedly, who has been an admiring witness of this one-handed skirmish.

'Miss Drummond, do you remember Mrs. White?' she asks, leaning forward, so as to compel Miss Drummond's attention. 'Old lady who took the cottage last November, and had more teeth than nature ever provided?'

'I remember,' says Miss Drummond, slowly, *very* slowly removing her baleful glance from the terrified baronet.

'She married more people than the Archbishop of Canterbury! She was a most determined old match-maker. She married two of my best friends to the wrong people when my back was turned, so I'm not likely to forgive her,' rattles on Mrs. Wemyss in the cause of peace.

'I'd like to see the person who could marry *me* against my will,' declares Miss Drummond, with subdued animosity born of the late encounter with the luckless Chaucer.

'So should I,' says Mr. Vyner, in a mild aside to Miss Ponsonby. 'That person is not of earthly mould! 'Cause why! I defy any one to produce the man she'd marry "*against* her will." "Sing hey! for Hymen!" is her motto.'

'High men, or low men—it is all the same to her,' says Sir Chicksy, gloomily, regarding his late assailant with a wrathful brow. (The small classical allusion has been hardly grasped by him.) 'I never saw such a cross girl!' says he.

'Such an odd little trick, too, as she had of covering up all her furniture in brown holland,' goes on Mrs. Wemyss, rapidly, pressing the absent Mrs. White forcibly into the service with a view to restoring equanimity all round. 'Chairs, lounges, priedieus, *all* were enveloped in brown bags. The monotony of it made the eye water. It was meant to preserve the colours beneath, she said.'

'Perhaps there were no colours beneath,' suggests Bruno. 'What a delicate swindle! What an excellent taking-in of all one's neighbours! When I marry (which is sure to be soon) I shall economise in that way. I shall shroud my home in cleanly linen, and swear to the non-existent velvets and satins beneath.'

'And I shall come to see you armed with a penknife with which to expose the fraud,' says Mrs. Wemyss.

'Oh, no; *you* won't come at all! You'll be there—a

partner in the fraud,' returns Bruno, daringly, but so as to be heard by her alone.

'For an old woman, did you ever meet any one so mad on yachting,' laughs Vyner, 'as that Mrs. White you speak of? She is never happy unless when on board her schooner.'

'It is on board that schooner she consummates half her villanies,' says Mrs. Wemyss. 'She used to say there was no place like a yacht for getting a man to propose—beats a country-house all to nothing.'

'You know her!' remarks Bruno. 'Every autumn she inveigles an eldest son into joining her in her tour to the Mediterranean or the South Seas, or the Antipodes, or somewhere. Then she smuggles in a penniless beauty, and sails away with 'em both, and refuses to put into port anywhere until the young man comes to the scratch. You can't get away from a girl, you see, on board a boat, so the man hasn't a chance unless he prefers drowning to matrimony. I hear the girl's mother pays all the expenses of the tour if the match comes off. Very fair bargain; saves Mrs. White a lot, you see, and gives her her autumn trip for nothing! Cheap arrangement, eh?'

'I don't believe in match-making,' says Miss Maturin, suddenly. 'It is a mistaken calling, and results in little good. I don't believe any one ever made a good match, as they call it.'

'Oh, there you are wrong,' interposes Mr. Vyner, mildly. 'Surely you have not forgotten Bryant and May!'

'Tut!' says Miss Maturin; but she laughs unrestrainedly with that pretty low laugh of hers, that even up to this has kept its youth; and somehow the sound of her mirth puts venom to flight more than all the enforced conversation that could be.

Miss Drummond, as though it is not congenial to her, rises and wanders away to where the children are playing with the kingcups and the daisies—little mites, too young to know what life means, and happier in their ignorance than they will ever be again. There are two of 'Dad's' *very* young boys among them, and a little boy from the parsonage, and the doctor's fairy of a daughter.

'Chaucer,' says Mr. Vyner, 'why aren't you upon your bended knees? Think of the explosion from which Mrs. Wemyss saved you. There was death in Miss Drummond's eye when first we caught her glance.'

'And I didn't do a bit to her!' exclaims Sir Chicksy, eagerly. 'Not a bit, give you my honour! Sort of told her I couldn't go to the garden with her—nothing more. There-upon she lost her temper awfully—quite *awfully*, I assure you.'

'No, she didn't,' says Vyner, sadly. 'That's the worst of it. If she only *would* lose it and never find it again the world would be the sweeter for her loss. Mrs. Wemyss, is a cigarette a crime?'

'Not here'—smiling. 'For myself, I like the perfume of tobacco.'

'Hah—smoke!' cries Mrs. Drummond, who has drawn near. 'But don't mind me, my dear'—to her hostess. 'Of course young men will be young men; and I daresay there are worse things than a pipe.'

'A few,' says Bruno. 'Not that I see a pipe anywhere.'

'Look at my Georgina,' says Mrs. Drummond, in a perfect overflow of motherly love—'always happiest when with the little ones! Shows such a thorough sweetness of disposition, such a hankering after that divine simplicity that belongs alone to childhood! But, in truth, my Georgina is at heart but a child herself.'

Silence follows upon this maternal rhapsody, a silence that is but the veil to cloak the reprehensible tendency towards laughter that is consuming all her hearers.

'What are you thinking of, Anthony?' asks Mrs. Wemyss, suddenly, to whom Mr. Vyner is an old friend. 'You are silent. Tell us of your thoughts.'

She says this merely to destroy the fear that the real nature of her own silence may be guessed.

'They were deep,' says Mr. Vyner, solemnly. 'They had much to do with a big bee booming busily by. Forgive the alliteration.'

'I love alliteration,' declares Mrs. Wemyss, calmly, whilst the others smile; 'don't you?'—to Mrs. Drummond.

'A—a *what*, my dear?' asks Mrs. Drummond vacantly, which upsets all decorum. There is one terrible moment, during which Mrs. Wemyss feels her afternoon is going to be a failure, and that presently Mrs. Drummond will be seen retiring from their midst offended past all hope. Then Bruno, seeing the agony in her eye, comes to the rescue, and makes some little passing remark at which they may laugh if they will, and at which they do, immoderately, to Mrs. Drummond's undisguised amazement.

‘How quiet you are, Dolores!’ says Mrs. Wemyss, caressingly, glancing at Miss Lorne as she lies back a little languidly in her wicker chair, a thoughtful, happy smile upon her lips. She has, indeed, been lost in an unconscious silence full of a nameless charm; but now, hearing herself thus called back into life, she learns for the first time that she *is* silent, and the sweetness of her musings comes to an end. She colours faintly, and casts a half-shy glance at Bouverie, who is leaning over her chair.

‘I was day-dreaming,’ she answers, nervously. ‘What a sunset it is, with its crimson glows and the orange tinge of the clouds! What a lovely neighbourhood to live in!’

‘Like Auburn, it is “the loveliest village of the plain,”’ says Vyner; and it is remarkable that there is no trace of cynicism in his tone as he speaks to her.

‘Yes, yes, indeed,’ she says, as though very pleased, and smiles upon him. Her large eyes are full of sweet enthusiasm, her pretty hair, shining like threads of gold, is blown hither and thither by the soft summer wind. She looks like some soft spirit from another world blown into ours.

‘How beautiful she is!’ exclaims Audrey, suddenly, looking impulsively at Vyner.

‘Very beautiful.’

‘What a pure little face! She is the dearest little baby of a thing—quite the angel type. I am sure, if she lived for a thousand years, the breath of scandal could not come nigh her.’

‘That is a remark that should be applicable to all women, shouldn’t it? To you, as well as to her?’ says Vyner, lazily; but something in his tone jars upon her.

‘Some people get things said of them, even though they may not deserve it a bit more than those others of the angelic type,’ she says, quickly. ‘It is unfair; but it is *so* all the same.’

‘By “some people” meaning yourself?’ asks he, flicking off the ash of his cigarette.

‘Never mind me,’ returns she, icily. ‘We were talking of Miss Lorne.’

‘Still, I do mind you,’ says Vyner. ‘The more so in that you are—— By-the-by, do you know you are looking very well to-day?’

‘Does that mean I was looking very ugly yesterday?’

‘I don’t think so, because I didn’t happen to see you

yesterday. But to return, then, to Miss Lorne. So she interests you ?

‘No. Nobody does that. I admire her ; that is all. I don’t find I ever have much to say to her ; but, as I told you before, she looks like an angel, and it is well to catch a glimpse now of what I may never see hereafter.’

‘Ah, you find her slow ?’ suggests Vyner, an almost imperceptible smile widening his lips.

‘I certainly don’t find her fast,’ replies she, with a quick frown. Then she rises to her feet. ‘I never talk to you,’ she cries, with sudden repulsion, ‘that I don’t feel the full hideousness of my life !’

She stares down at him with angry, glowing eyes ; but he seems impervious to her wrath.

‘Don’t go yet,’ he says, as evenly and in as friendly a tone as if those flashing eyes above him had been soft as violets. ‘I’ve got no one to talk to but you. Don’t forsake me !’

There is no unwonted eagerness in the manner of his request, and she still stands looking down upon him as he tranquilly smokes his cigarette, her heart throbbing with a most unpleasant force.

‘I wanted to ask you about the old boy,’ begins Mr. Vyner. Then he stops short, and a flush overspreads his countenance. ‘I beg your pardon,’ he says, really horror-stricken at his mistake. ‘I meant your father—Dad !’

‘Call him that first name, if you will. I like it,’ says Miss Ponsonby, eagerly. All her *hauteur* has vanished, and a sudden, warm, lovely smile brightens her cold haughty face into a vivid beauty. ‘It makes me feel he is still *young* ; that there is no fear I shall ever lose him,’ she says, tenderly.

For a moment Vyner makes her no reply. He is watching the curious soft light within her eyes, and perhaps marvelling at it ; but, even as he watches it, the fresh light fades, and the first look of resentment returns.

‘You shall speak to me of Dad another time ; I am not in the humour now,’ she murmurs coldly, and moves away from him to where Dolores is sitting calm and sweet.

Meantime Mrs. Drummond is talking confidentially to her friend (?) Mrs. Dovedale on a matter that has been much troubling her of late—namely, the questionable propriety of her having purposely omitted to send Audrey a card for her ball that is to take place to-morrow evening.

‘Of course, now the duchess has taken her into such high



favour, it makes things awkward,' she says to Mrs. Dovedale, with quite a tremor in her voice. 'I wish, after all, I *had* invited her, though her aunt Lady Bouverie certainly detests her. Do you think, dear, that, if I were to ask her now, even at this last moment—giving a proper excuse of course—that she would come? Give me your candid opinion now, my love, because, to confess the truth to you, I am uneasy about it. Not that I like the girl; only——'

'No, no; she is too attractive to be liked,' murmurs little Mrs. Dovedale, in her childish treble. 'Yes, ask her. If you do, you can at least always say she refused, you know, and that it was not jealousy that induced you to exclude her.'

'Jealousy! I am not jealous of her,' exclaims Mrs. Drummond, reddening uncomfortably.

'No? I thought perhaps Georgina——But of course——Well, ask her, I say. Her refusal can do you no harm.'

'But *will* she refuse?' says Mrs. Drummond, indignantly. 'I don't believe it. She will be only too glad to escape the monotony of her life for even one night. She is—er—er—very poor, you know; and people like that should not give themselves airs.'

Mrs. Dovedale laughs prettily.

'But rich people may; is that it?' she asks. 'Long ago we—that is, my people—used to think that only those who had grandfathers—generations—tiresomely long genealogies, you know—could dare to hold up their heads. Now it is all different—all the other way round, isn't it?' She laughs again. 'But about Miss Ponsonby?' she goes on. 'Why, do ask her; it will do her no harm, you see, and you—no good! How pretty she looks to-day—and how completely she has enslaved Sir Chicksy!'

'She is artful in the extreme; but I suppose I had better ask her,' says Mrs. Drummond, reluctantly, moving away to where Audrey is sitting, to Mrs. Dovedale's discomfiture, who, for some reason or reasons unknown, would gladly have left Miss Ponsonby without even this late invitation.

'Dear Miss Ponsonby,' says Mrs. Drummond, fluttering up to Audrey with a simpering smile upon her inexpressive countenance, and what, in a wild flight of fancy, she believes to be a genial manner, 'so glad to find you alone for a moment.'

She hovers round her for a minute with all sails spread, and then sinks into the seat beside her.

'I am generally alone,' returns Audrey, coldly; then, 'Do

you think you could manage to keep a little more to the left? Ah, thanks! Your umbrella is of such an abnormal size,—and I do so hate having my bonnet disarranged.'

'I have much wanted a word with you,' says Mrs. Drummond, effusively. 'That absurd mistake about your invitation for to-morrow night—our dance, you know. I can't think how it occurred.'

'No?' Audrey turns two clear cold eyes upon her. 'But where was the mistake?'

'Why, not sending you a card, my dear. It was quite an oversight—*quite*! May I hope you will forgive it, and give us the pleasure of your company all the same?'

'You are really too good!' says Miss Ponsonby, slowly, after a distressingly long pause that brings Mrs. Drummond's face to the colour of a peony. 'And pray do not distress yourself about the mistake—there was none! *Had* you sent me that card you speak of, it would have been a *bêtise* indeed; but, as it is—*Would* you try to keep your parasol a little more that way?—As it is, I find it quite impossible to accept your kind invitation.'

'But, my dear Miss Ponsonby—'

'I beg you will not give me the trouble of refusing you twice,' interrupts Audrey, haughtily, turning from her with the gesture of an offended queen, and with all the air of one who is undoubtedly speaking to some one of very inferior quality.

Mrs. Drummond, more crushed than she cares to admit, rises precipitately, and carries herself and her parasol to a distant part of the grounds. Mr. Vyner, who has watched the whole manœuvre from afar, slips into her vacant chair, and laughs aloud.

'I hope you weren't too severe,' he says. 'What could she have said, poor fat soul, to bring down those wrathful glances on her head?'

'The insolence of her!' breathes Miss Ponsonby, between her teeth.

'Yes? She was inviting you to-day to her ball to-morrow night—eh?'

'You seem to know everything. Perhaps, too, you know my answer?'

'I can guess it: "No."'

'For once you are right.'

'For twice, you mean. Though, I must confess, Mrs. Dove-dale helped me to my first guess. You won't go?'

'No, I have no desire to enter her aristocratic circle. I can actually—so poor is my spirit—manage to live outside it.'

'Little girls shouldn't be sarcastic.'

'However, there is one thing,' says Audrey, turning to him with a bitter smile; 'my going or staying will cause no one pain or pleasure. To me all the world is indifferent. I have no friends; therefore there is a virtue in my unpopularity. My absence to-morrow night will make no one unhappy.'

'True! There is good to be found in everything,' replies he sententiously.

Perhaps she had expected a different answer from so old a friend. At all events, for an instant his words throw a deeper shadow on her face. *Only* for an instant; then it clears, and she laughs with a sudden sense of amusement.

'Why, look you,' she says, 'you are the only one that does me real good! From you one gets the truth, however unpalatable; you are a tonic in yourself. I should always have you near me to say sharp things to me, to help me keep my balance, and not lose my head over the world's injustice. There are times, you see, when I am discontented, peevish, and "sick with hating the sweet sun."''

'Whose son?' asks Mr. Vyner, calm judicial inquiry in his eye. He even leans anxiously towards her, as though athirst for information. His frivolity enrages her.

'There, go!' she exclaims, in a low tone full of passionate anger.

It is a tone he dares not disobey. He saunters slowly away from her, and is soon lost amidst a group at the other side of the lawn.

'How I hate him!' says Audrey, very softly, letting one hand grow clinched beneath the folds of her gown, where no one can see it, and biting her pale lips to bring them back their colour.

A few drops of rain begin to fall placidly. First in ones, and then in twos and threes they come, until the pattering drops grow too rapid for counting.

'Dolores, where is your shawl? You are not sufficiently covered,' cries Miss Maturin, anxiously, who seems never for one moment to forget the welfare of her darling.

'Yes—better come in-doors,' says Bouverie, bending tenderly over Miss Lorne.

'Let us all go and sit on the veranda,' suggests Mrs. Wemyss, pleasantly, 'until this summer shower be over-past.'

Come, Miss Maturin, we will lead the way, and perhaps the servants will be good-natured enough to give us our tea at last. Ah, Sir Chicksy! useful always! I'm sure I don't see how we could ever get on without you!'

The youthful baronet bestows upon her a grateful glance, and continues his occupation of gathering up all the loose wraps forgotten by eager owners rushing towards the welcome shelter of the veranda. Now, reaching that happy goal himself, he marches up and down among the other guests with his hands clasped beneath his coat-tails. This is a favourite attitude of his, that makes him look like nothing in the world so much as a superannuated jackdaw. Everyone is having tea and cake, or wine and fruit, or something, and Sir Chicksy is hopping about among them in great contentment of spirit. For is not she here—his queen, his 'ladye'? By such high-sounding titles does he designate in his own mind his scornful love—Miss Ponsonby.

'Oh, I say,' he calls out suddenly to no one in particular, 'look here! Tell you the funniest thing I saw yesterday—man in the street, you know!'

Here he pauses somewhat vaguely, whereupon everybody stares at him. Surprise, largely mingled with curiosity, is general. Where does the joke come in? That is what they all want to know, but yet fail to see, except indeed Mr. Vyner, who appears radiant with enthusiastic sympathy and full of understanding.

'By Jove, that *was* funny!' he says. 'What luck for you! Think he'll be there again?'

'He may; I'm not sure. Wait a bit,' says Sir Chicksy, absently.

Now everybody is speechless with amazement. Dolores looks concerned, Miss Ponsonby a little shade deeper in colour than she was a moment since. Have the poor little man's brains failed him at last?

Mrs. Wemyss and Bruno are fast approaching that last fatal stage when mirth will have its way, when all at once Sir Chicksy's face shows signs of intellect, and the fire of a knowledge just grasped lights within his beaming eye.

'I have it,' he cries triumphantly, 'I've got it! I knew there was a word for it somewhere, but it slipped me. He was an acrobat! My fellow in the street was an acrobat, and I never saw a better. He chewed up everything he could lay his hands on, from brass buttons to cabbages!'

'And why?' asks Mr. Vyner, mournfully. 'Was he so very hungry, then, poor soul?'

'Not at all, not at all,' returns Sir Chicksy, in perfect good faith, feeling immensely pleased at the interest he has so evidently created in the breast of Anthony Vyner. 'It was only his tricks, you know.'

'Naughty old man!' says Mrs. Wemyss, laughing gaily. 'At his age to be so frivolous! But perhaps he wasn't so old, after all. Was he young and tender, Sir Chicksy? Were his features mild and mellow?'

'They were rather marked,' confesses Sir Chicksy, with some reluctance. 'Especially his cheeks and his brow; he'd had small-pox, I am afraid. And, as for his nose, why, it was tremendous!'

"Give me a man with a nose," said the Duke of Wellington,' puts in Bruno, with encouragement in voice and eye.

'Well, I don't suppose he would have preferred a man without one,' says Mrs. Wemyss, saucily, which rather destroys the effect of Bruno's speech. 'That's all nonsense, you know. Well, Sir Chicksy, and what did your man do?'

'Everything!' declares Sir Chicksy, with growing excitement; 'but last thing beat all. He stood on his head and drank a glass of beer without spilling a drop! He did, I give you my word.'

'What intelligence, what talent!' breathes rather than speaks Mr. Vyner.

'I thought he'd have choked,' goes on Sir Chicksy, eagerly. 'But he didn't; never even got black in the face. Awfully funny now, wasn't it?'

'Never heard of anything so comic in all my life,' says Vyner, 'Oh, how I wish I could drink a glass of beer standing on my head before an admiring audience—this audience, for example'—with a loving smile at Miss Drummond, who goes down before it.

'So should I,' says Sir Chicksy. 'I'd give anything to be an acrobat.'

'Especially on a sunny June day,' puts in Bruno, dryly, 'with the thermometer ninety in the shade, and the dust on the roadway two inches deep.'

'That would only make it softer for one's poor head,' persists Vyner, with a calmly argumentative air.

'But, dear Sir Chicksy, surely you would not care to go

about posing in the middle of muddy roads?' cooes Mrs. Dovedale. 'Think how your friends would resent it?'

'Of course, I couldn't do it in public,' acknowledges Sir Chicksy, regretfully; 'but in a drawing-room now—h'm?—after dinner—with the curtains drawn—eh?—just to amuse one's friends—d'ye see?—to cause a—a little change—eh? Some fellows can be amusing all round,' says Sir Chicksy, with a rueful air, 'and some fellows can't, you know. But I think *any* fellow who could stand on his head without kicking, and drink his beer so, without spilling a drop, might be considered—er—doing something—er—agreeable—eh?'

At this all the women break into a peal of irresistible laughter.

'Oh, Sir Chicksy!' cries Mrs. Wemyss, at last. 'Why need you *try* to be amusing? You needn't. No acrobat that ever saw the light could make himself as amusing as you are now.'

'No, but really though,' goes on the baronet, earnestly, fumbling vainly with his eye-glass, which he has foolishly brought into prominence, and now does not know how to get rid of. 'Twas very clever—the man's performance I mean, —extraordinary clever, I assure you. You'd have been delighted with it.

'I feel that,' says Mrs. Wemyss.

'Why can't we all go in a body and learn how to do it?' asks Bruno. 'Where is your conjurer, Sir Chicksy? If we could only catch him, we might buy from him his ware.'

'I don't know where he is,' says Sir Chicksy. 'He went down the street and away, looking very desolate, I thought. Not a soul was with him, and he limped a little as though worn out. There had been fifty or more gaping at him when he had been—er—er—acrobating you know; but they vanished into thin air when his juggling had come to an end. The first fellow he held out his old battered hat to was on the edge of the crowd, and he stuck his hand in his breeches pocket, and stared and stammered and gave—*nothing*! And I give you my word, whilst the acrobat waited on *him*—it took only one minute—all the other forty-nine disappeared. In the twinkling of an eye, as it were, they were gone; I couldn't see where, unless the earth had opened to swallow 'em up.'

'Pity it didn't,' says Miss Ponsonby, with a little curious indrawing of her lips.

'I don't really believe they gave him one farthing.'

'Forty thieves,' says Miss Maturin, 'to take his goods and give him no payment!'

'I watched the whole scene from the window of Benson's seed-shop,' goes on Sir Chicksy, 'and I thought to myself, how forlorn he looked trudging lamely down the deserted village street.'

'You shouldn't have left him—that way, I mean,' says Audrey, suddenly, regarding him with a slight frown. 'You too enjoyed his performance, though from the secrecy of a window.'

'I had to leave him,' says Sir Chicksy, hastily, the severity of his goddess's tone causing him deep tribulation. 'I had to get you your books, you know, and there was that message for Mr. Ponsonby besides. I was uncommon sorry to see him go away like that—he looked so poverty-stricken, and so horribly like—er—consumption, you know.'

'Oh, poor, poor man!' murmurs Dolores, softly, her eyes filling with tears. All at once it seems to her that she can see the sweet drowsy June afternoon, the tiny hot deserted street, the drooping dusty trees, and, at the end of it all, the limping figure of the poor acrobat creeping wearily along, homeless, friendless, alone! Dear Heaven, how sad to feel like that—*alone!* Bouverie, unseen by the others, lays his hand with a comforting touch upon the back of her head, and smooths, with loving fingers, her soft silken rings of hair.

'All the more reason why you should have done something for him!' says Audrey, coldly, still transfixing the agonised baronet with a contemptuous glance.

'To help him to another living?' asks Sir Chicksy, still quite at sea as to her meaning. 'He wouldn't like that, you know—he'd hate it. He is accustomed to the life he now leads, and would object to another. An acrobat is an acrobat, you know.' This is an undeniable fact, so nobody seeks to upset it.

'Hear, hear,' says Mr. Vyner, with open approbation.

'And you can't change a man's mode of life all in a moment,' goes on Sir Chicksy, earnestly. 'You can't make a tinker into an archbishop in five minutes, can you now?'

This is another incontrovertible fact, and no one tries to dispute it either.

'He is getting so deep,' says Mr. Vyner to his next neighbour, 'that, if some one doesn't give him a helping hand soon, he'll drown.'

'You might have shown him some sympathy,' persists Audrey, still addressing Sir Chicksy.

'I did. I don't think I ever felt more sorry for any one,' declares Sir Chicksy, almost in tears.

'What I mean is,' exclaims Audrey, losing her patience and therefore coming bluntly to her real meaning, 'that, instead of feeling so much, you might have given him some money.'

'Why, of course I gave him money !' returns Sir Chicksy, indignantly. 'Good gracious ! He was just the sort one couldn't look at without giving him money. I gave him five shillings.' He blushes over this confession. At the time of giving, five shillings had seemed quite enough ; now he feels a sovereign would have been quite too altogether shabby.

'Then why didn't you say so ?' demands Audrey, naturally much incensed, yet pleased too that her suspicions were unfounded.

'I didn't know that was what you wanted me to say,' replies he, ingenuously. 'I thought you would have known !'

At this everybody smiles, and Mr. Vyner breaking off a little rose-bud from the wall near him, throws it into Audrey's lap.

'It took time, didn't it ?' he says carelessly, but with a touch of suppressed amusement in his eyes.

'Even if so, it was worth waiting for,' returns she, quickly. Then—not angrily, not even unsmilingly, yet with a cold decision—she throws the rose-bud back to him. Mr. Vyner, catching it, sits down and placidly commences to devour it leaf by leaf. Plainly he derives from its pink heart much and varied musings, as he speaks no word to any one until its last petal is consumed.

'Somebody is coming,' says Mrs. Wemyss, suddenly ; 'I feel it. Somebody is in the drawing-room. Look, one of you, and say who it is.'

Bruno, lifting the lace curtain of the open window near him, glances carelessly into the drawing-room. Not so careless, however, is his glance as he once more faces his friends.

'My Mother !' says he, in capital letters ; and a universal rout is the result. Consternation sits on every face ; every one at once finds it is very late, and quite time to bid their



hostess adieu. Mr. Vyner alone rises gracefully to the occasion and his feet. He welcomes Lady Bouverie among them with a subdued effusiveness that creates admiration in the breast of Mrs. Wemyss, and brings the word 'hypocrite!' to Audrey's scornful lips.

'No. Would you really call me that?' asks he, with grieved surprise, overhearing her. 'Odd, if true, because in reality I am the most straightforward person alive! But these little complications of character—— Going now? Well, I shall walk home with you then, and explain to you my hypocritical honesty and the honesty of my hypocrisy as we go.'

'Sir Chicksy can take care of me,' says Audrey, icily.

'And so can I,' Mr. Vyner assures her, cheerfully. 'Two escorts are better than one. Can you deny that? And, besides, Sir Chicksy—though quite the most intelligent and charming person I know—might, in one of his erudite reveries, lose his way and lead you into the next county, and then what should I—I mean what would "Dad" do?'

He laughs. She turns impatiently aside; but the little soft light that always creeps into her eyes when 'Dad's' name is mentioned comes there now; and, without making any further objection, she beckons to Sir Chicksy, and bidding Mrs. Wemyss good-bye goes down the avenue escorted by the two young men.

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## CHAPTER XI.

Fair as a rose is on earth, as a rose under water in prison.

We are not sure of sorrow,  
And joy was never sure.

SWINBURNE.

'SOMETIME too hot the eye of heaven shines,' but not to-day. There is a chastened measure in its strength, a little tremulous subduing of its mighty power this afternoon that shows itself in paler sunbeams and in the sighing of the dainty winds that linger in lawn and woodway. Up from the sea they come, scented with salted spray, laying cool touches upon all they pass; the great calm of the day is rendered even calmer by them, so gentle are they; the constant roar of the waves is hushed to silence. Peace lies on land and water.

The winds, with wonder whist,  
Smoothly the waters kist,  
Whispering new joys to the mild ocean,  
Who now hath quite forgot to rave  
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmed wave.

The world is a day older ; the sun is mounted high in his blue kingdom ; the roses are a few hours nearer their death—happy death, coming with glow of yellow warmth, and rushing of sultry winds !

With half a mind to go to the beach, Dolores left her home an hour ago ; but a fond remembrance of the river checked her desire for the more noble sea, and, turning aside, she had sought the sylvan shade of trees and the quaint, musical murmur of the rippling water, gliding over rugged stone, and past soft bending mosses.

Now, stooping over its brink, she notes her own sweet image in its quivering depths, and wonders vaguely if it is bearing it away to the limitless ocean beyond. The limitless ocean of life—what has that got in store for her ? Whither is it hurrying her ? To what unknown seas, what tempests ? She draws her breath quickly, and laughs at her own dismal imaginings. Nay, then, into what calm depths and pleasant harbours is it carrying her, with Dick for guide and lover and guardian ?

Does the thought of him bring him ? His voice, far-off as yet, pierces the soft air and comes to her, faintly, but unmistakably. It is the accent dearest to her on earth, and she turns gladly in its direction, and waits with eager longing the coming of its owner.

Evidently he is not alone. His voice is suggestive of question and answer ; it rises, fades away into nothingness, as if awaiting a reply, and then rises again. A little feeling that is scarcely jealousy, but is perhaps uncertainty, chills the smile upon Dolores's lips. And now there is no fading away of the voice ; it holds its own, without interruption, until it is made plain to the listener that Dick has the conversation all to himself. It is rather a mixed discourse, and has apparently—from the little she can hear of it—a good deal to do with people of another and an airier clime than ours.

There are, for example, allusions made to an ancient dame whose chief purpose in life it seemed to be to clear the sky of superfluous cobwebs ; and to an elderly gentleman—an elderly reprobate would be nearer the mark—whose only joy consisted

in the possession of 'his pipe and his glass and his fiddlers three.'

Then all at once the corner is turned, and Dick comes towards her, smiling the fond eager smile that belongs alone to her, bearing in his arms a little curious bundle pressed kindly to his breast. Across the dewy grasses he comes to her, his unwonted burden clinging closely to him.

'Why, it is a little child!' exclaims Dolores, going up to him, and turning a frightened, brown, half-tearful face towards her with a gentle palm.

'Yes, and *such* a little child!' says Dick, laughing. 'I found her in the very depths of the wood, like another "babe," lost, crying her poor little eyes out. And no wonder too!'—looking in friendly wise at the little mite he is carrying, who is gazing back at him with trustful but distended eyes—'when we remember about poor Red-riding-hood and the wolf she met, and all the pixies and giants and——'

'An' bogies!' says the child, suddenly, with breathless awe; she tightens her arms round his neck. There is plainly a fearful joy to her in this recounting of woodland horrors. After one swift glance at Dolores, she has turned from her and clung afresh to her preserver. She is a singularly pretty child, beautiful with all the charm of undeveloped youth.

'Isn't she like a woodland elf herself?' asks Dick, admiringly.

'And wasn't it well she met you? Poor little thing! Where does she live?' asks Dolores.

'Somewhere in the village, as far as I can make out. But my small captive is exceedingly vague in her replies. Shall I take her up to the house and get one of the servants to restore her to her mother—whosoever she may be?'

'Yes, yes; and I'll come with you. Her mother—oh, perhaps she is in misery about her all this time.'

'It is a long walk there and back. Better stay where you are, darling, and let me dispose of the little one. Rest here upon the bank, and think of me,' laughing, 'until I return to you; I sha'n't be long.'

'Well, hurry then!' she says, reluctantly; and as she lifts her face to kiss the child in his arms, he stoops and kisses *her* as a brief farewell.

She watches him as he moves with quick, strong step towards Greylands, and then, seating herself upon the mossy turf, prepares to wait for his return. The day is warm,

seductive, languorous—wooing to slumber ; she leans her head upon the scented bank and falls into a profound slumber.

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Bending over her, fearful of rousing her from her happy sleep, he notes with a sudden sense of pain the strange sweet delicacy of her face. One little hand is under her white chin, her rounded cheek is buried in velvety mosses ; over her head, trailing downwards from the gnarled old oak above her, a fragrant branch of the 'lush eglantine' is swaying to and fro, its rich scents strewing the air and blowing soft into her dainty dreams.

How young, how sweet, how guileless she appears—and alas, how frail ! How easily, too, sleep comes to her, as though it is in truth a necessity to her, as if the happy spirit, too strong for the weak body, has wearied it and driven it into the arms of slumber, there to regain its strength.

Kneeling beside her, he puts back with loving careful fingers the little sunny rings of hair, wind-tossed, that lie upon her tranquil brow. He would have liked to take her in his arms and feel her head against his breast, but the fear of wakening her is all too strong within him.

How well he remembers that first day they met, when his eyes had seen her lying in her silken hammock with the seal of Death's twin-sister resting on her as it rests now. It is as but yesterday when thus he saw her—tranquil, unconscious, full of a beauty indescribable that savoured more of heaven than earth. Even then—how long ago it now seems !—all his soul must have gone out to her. But how quiet she is now, how pale ; scarcely her breath seems to part her lips ! A sudden terror seizes him ; he lays his hand upon her arm.

Slowly her white lids updraw themselves, and a gleam from the tender dark grey eyes falls upon his anxious face. First there is a little shrinking, born of uncertainty in her glance, and then an unutterable sweetness, as she realizes the fact that it is indeed her heart's lover who is bending over her.

'Ah, it is you !' she says, with a little sigh of deepest satisfaction, and, with a movement full of childish grace and pleasure, she lifts one arm and slips it round his neck. 'I was tired of waiting. I fell asleep—dreamed——'

'Of me ?'

'No ; of something vague, shadowy, unhappy. I was in a darkness—a terrible darkness, out of which no one could rescue

me. I was groping in a blind fashion where there was nothing to lay hold of—no hope !' she shudders violently. 'I was glad when I awoke,' she goes on, with a sigh and an involuntary gesture that draws him nearer to her. She pauses, and then finishes with unconscious sadness : 'You were not there—you did not come to help me.'

'Which shows how unstable are all such vapory things as dreams. Where could you be, my beloved, that I would not come to your assistance ? Your griefs, your fears, are now all mine.'

'There is one thing,' says Dolores, lifting herself on her elbow, and looking at him with a grave sweet smile, 'that I have never yet told you. It is how much I love you. Do you know how much ? With my whole—*whole* heart.'

'And I—how do I love you ?' asks he, with passionate fondness, tightening his arms round her lissom figure. 'Listen—'

'Just as I love you,' interrupts she, hastily ; 'not *less*—not *more*. Why should one of us outdo the other ? No ; our love is equal in its strength. I could not be dearer to you, Dick, than you are to me.'

'I wonder if you know to what a vast amount you are pledging yourself ?' asks he, smiling.

'Yesterday'—lifting shy but unfaltering eyes to his—'I was reading a love story, and I was wondering if it really *was* so sweet to have some one who—who loved one better than all the world beside. And it was a bad hour with me as I thought of all this and doubted ; but now—now——'

'Yes—now ?' eagerly.

'Ah, now I *know* !' she whispers sweetly, laying her soft head, with a little sigh of content, upon his arm.

'Do you know what you remind me of ?' asks Dick, presently. 'Of white violets. You are not like a rose or a lily, but a frail, pure violet. I don't know why it is, but you always make me think of that sweetest of flowers.'

'Do I ?'—she smiles at him as if greatly pleased. 'Shall I wear violets in my gown at Mrs. Drummond's ball to-night ? Do you know I really think no flowers are so nice as violets. I am so glad you think me like them. I am wearing white, as usual. Shall I put purple violets in the folds ? They would not be real, of course ; but I think they would look pretty. Yes ?'

She raises earnest eyes to his. It is an important question,

this arrangement of the coloring that is to render her fair to night.

'Should I look nice so?' she asks, with pretty anxiety.

'Oh, love, how is it you would *not* look nice?' exclaims he. And then, with sudden sharp fear,— 'Oh, darling, why do you look so pale, so fragile? I am afraid for you! A terrible dread that some day you will fade away from me altogether, kills half the happiness your sweet presence yields me.'

'Nay,' returns she, laughing, and tenderly pushing back the hair from his forehead. 'What a silly boy! Am I snow, that I should melt? And all this is because my cheeks are a little pale to-day. Well, I shall punish them.' She raises her hands playfully, and pinches her cheeks until perforce the laggard blood rushes into them. 'Now shall I fade?' she says, rubbing her lovely flushed face against his.

'Poor little face!' Struggling still with a nameless depression, he draws her closer to him. 'I shall not allow you so to ill-use it.'

She is smiling at him with parted lips and happy eyes, and with two soft crimson spots upon her cheeks, burned there by the unkindly touch of her slender fingers. She is sitting on the mossy bank, and has taken her knees into her embrace, and is bending towards him.

'Let us talk of something else,' she says.

'How can we? It seems to me that there is nothing in all the world but you.'

'There you are wrong,' murmurs she, lightly, laying her fingers with a quick fond gesture on his lips, 'because there is *you*!'

At this they laugh with a soft lightness, not because of the excellence of their small joke, but just for the very love of laughter, they being young and fond and happy withal.

'Oh, Dolores!' says Dick, gently but suddenly taking her face between both his hands. Such a beautiful face, constant and trustful as an angel's! The laughter has died from him now, and there is an intensity of love and passion in his voice, and always, too, that undercurrent of fear. Having looked at her for a long minute, he lifts the hand that has touched his lips, and, slipping it round his neck, takes her into his arms and draws her nearer to him until her head rests upon his shoulder.

'You are still unhappy about something,' she says, gently, with all the sure intuition of a sweet and sensitive soul. 'It

is about me? You think I shall die—is it not? But it is not death that will come to me. Comfort yourself with that thought—if it *be* comfort. It will be something else that will come. I don't know what,'—a little vaguely,—'but auntie does. She looks at me so sadly when I laugh or smile. But it will not be death!'

A strange earnest look has come into her face. She presses her lips to his cheek, and then sinks back into his embrace with a little sigh. It is not a sorrowful sigh, but one full of contentment.

'Why should anything come to you but happiness?' says Bouverie. There is a certainty in the way she has declared her disbelief in the advent of death that has somehow comforted him. Any evil, minor to that, would be to him as naught.

'Why, indeed?' returns she, lightly. 'And yet—I think it will be so. But'—with a pretty pretence at anger—'have I not told you to talk of something else—anything—but me.'

'Of our marriage, then,' says Bouverie. 'Once you are really mine, what evil thing can assail you? Then your sad little forebodings will die of lack of nutriment. Your lips shall take again that sorrowful curve if they dare! Your eyes—What eyes you have, Dolores!' He turns up her chin and gazes into the clear depths of her soul's windows with a wondering adoration.

Beauty lies in many eyes,  
But love in yours, my Nora Creina,

he chants in a low voice. 'But I forget,' he cries presently, with an assumption of terror. 'I must talk of anything but you. Of our marriage, then, as I said before.'

'Of our marriage?' She pauses; the colour deepens in her face, and

From every blush that kindles in her cheeks  
Ten thousand little loves and graces spring.

'Do you know,' she says, softly, 'I very often think how it will be with us then,—whether we shall be very unhappy, or—I shall be always thinking of you, of course, and wondering how you like this and that and the other things to be done, and what you like best for dinner. That's a man's chief thought,—his dinner,—isn't it? After me,—that is, I mean, of course, after the woman he loves?'

'Is it?' says Bouverie. There is a materialism about this idea that affects him disagreeably.

'Yes,' declares Dolores, with a little assuring nod. 'I shall therefore watch you when dinner begins, and every time you refuse a dish I shall dismiss cook,—that is, if she is a mild woman and I am not too much afraid of her.'

'You're sure to be afraid of any cook, gentle or simple,' says Dick, laughing, and thinking what a darling little mistress of a house she will be. *His* house! 'But, as I never yet looked coldly on my dinner, cook's all right. But where shall we live, Dolores?'

'Ah, *that*!' says Dolores. A trembling silence follows her exclamation; and then,—'I wanted to say it to you so many times,' she whispers, with a quivering smile: 'but—Dick, let us live with auntie!' She has turned to him, an eager pleading in her lovely eyes. 'She would not be happy without me,' she says in a low whisper.

'And you?' asks Bouverie, a momentary, most natural, touch of jealousy in his tone. 'Could *you* know no happiness without her,—even with me?'

He has taken her hand, and is gazing at her with a strange expression not to be misunderstood. She turns a little white, and her breath comes in soft fitful catches, but her great luminous eyes do not fall before his.

'I should know happiness,' she says, gently,—'a happiness too deep for words,—but not a worthy one. My contentment would be incomplete. Think what auntie has been to me all my life,—my mother, my friend! Should I be the more sacred to you if I forgot her, when my heart grew fulfilled with the joy of your love? Were *I* to forget, were *you* to counsel forgetfulness—would that be *me*—would that be *you*? Oh, Dick, speak to me!' She bursts out crying.

'I don't know what I said,' exclaims Dick, distractedly, feeling as if each sob of hers is an arrow dividing his body and soul; 'I only know I meant nothing that should distress you. Dolores, my own life, we shall live with auntie—with *any* one, even with my mother, if you wish it.'

This last awful proposition proves as potent as a magic philter, and instantly restores Miss Lorne to calm.

'Not that,' she exclaims nervously; 'but Dick,—*dear* Dick,—are you sure you will not object to have auntie as one of our household? She is *my* mother—let her be yours too.'

'With all my heart,' agrees Dick, genially. 'Though how



I'm to reconcile it to my conscience, I don't know ! Two mothers ! Why, see what an unconscionable lot of trouble it is giving ! You make me feel quite ashamed of myself ; but, if you *will* have it so—— Now are your eyes dry, you little baby ?

'Yes, yes,' says Dolores, smiling softly. 'It was silly of me to doubt you, was it not ? But I was just a little afraid of you at first ; and——'

'Afraid,' interrupts Bouverie,—'and of me ! Darling, let us have that perfect love between us that casteth out fear ; let us be of one mind, and'—stoutly—'let that mind be yours !'

This arrangement is so eminently satisfactory that no further argument ensues upon it.

And now on these two beside the river an exquisite silence falls,—a silence too fraught with unspoken thought to be oppressive—and with thought so sweet ! Surely there are moments when bleak earth catches a spark that falls from the fire of heaven !

A tiny squirrel in the old oak-tree above them, springing from branch to branch, pauses abruptly over their heads, and, gaining courage from the utter stillness that encompasses them, sniffs daintily at the pretty picture they present. The soft head of the girl lying so happily upon her lover's breast, the lover's glad content, the white robe, the parted lips, the little jewelled hands, and, close to it all, the soft but cruel hurry of the river rushing ever onwards to the ocean,—there is no lingering, no kindly hesitation about it, only a wild, if subdued, hurry to its goal,—to the end of all things.

Dolores, marking the deadly monotony of its haste, shivers slightly in her lover's arms. Do all things hurry so ? Is there no gracious delay, no tender dallying ? Are life and death but so many quivering eddies that mark, yet fail to check, the vast onrush of Fate ? And what is Fate bringing to her ? Life, is it,—or death,—or joy, perchance,—or perchance——

Ah, what a word to ring in her ears ! And yet how loudly it peals through mead and woodland ! Shame—*shame* ! What can it have to do with *her* ? Yet 'shame !' is the sound that echoes from sloping hill upon her right, to placid moorland down below.

She flings the echo from her ; she laughs inwardly, and nestles a little closer to Bouverie, as though her shield is here. Across the scented grasses a sweet wind is blown,—a music weird and mystical ascends from the bosom of the impatient

river. Deep in the wood the sounds of cooing pigeons may be heard.

The summer leaves hung over our heads,  
The flowers burst round our feet,  
And in the gloamin' o' the wood  
The throssil whistled sweet.

By an effort she rouses herself from the reverie into which they both have fallen.

'Of what are you thinking, O recreant sweetheart,' she murmurs gaily, withdrawing herself from his embrace and turning his chin by a loving touch in her own direction, 'that no word has 'scaped you all this long, long time?'

'Why, of my ladye-love, be sure!'

'And she—whom may she be?'

'One Mistress Dolores Lorne, by your grace, madam, an' it please you.'

'By my halidame, sir, an' it does please me! An'—Oh, Dick, how nice you look with that stern courtier-like air upon you! But would you'—she hesitates—the admiration so lately assumed dies altogether from her eyes, and a certain fear takes its place—'would you ever look at me like that?' she asks nervously, quite forgetful of her momentary appreciation.

'Am I not looking at you now?'

'Oh, no,—not at me! You imagined me some one else, is it not? But it came to me that, if in the years to come, you were ever to regard me like that, I should——'

'What, beloved?'

'Die, perhaps,'—laughing; then—'Tell me,' she says, leaning towards him—'are you ever really stern like that? Are you'—leaning even closer—'ever like—*your mother*?'

'How can I be sure?' returns he, slowly. 'She is my mother. Why should I then positively declare that there is no likeness between us? And yet——'

'Yes?' hopefully and breathlessly.

'I know that I can love, whilst she—— Do you think I would chance anything with you, Dolores? Whatever demon I may have inherited, it is not so strong as the angel that has come to me since first my eyes fell on you. I could not risk anything with *you*. I could not forget the greatness of the gift you have given me,—your own sweet self. I daresay I've got a bad temper. My mother'—with a little bitter laugh—'reminds me of it often enough to make me sure of it. But,

tell me'—gazing anxiously into her luminous eyes—'that you know I should never be anything but gentle with you.'

'Yes ; I know it.'

She rises slowly to her feet, and stretches out her arms with a soft languishing gesture towards the setting sun. Then all at once she laughs, and, turning to him, lays both her small palms against his, and gives him a loving but vehement little push.

'And this is how I know it,' she says, with the most charming assumption of sauciness. 'It is because you wouldn't *dare* to be otherwise—so now !'

She shakes her dainty head at him,—her pretty head with all its soft riotous rings of hair that tremble like gold in the dying sunshine. Her parted lips are full of laughter, 'her eyes are as eyes of a dove.'

'I must go,' she exclaims, suddenly, lightly unfastening the chains that bind her.

'Not yet. Why, it is quite early.'

'Nevertheless, my last hour has come. I have promised Audrey to give her her tea this afternoon, and it is now half-past four. At five I am due. Give me my hat.'

'Give me some tea, too,' says Mr. Bouverie, eagerly. 'I never felt so thirsty in all my life ! I'll come home with you and help you to pour it out. That will be doing you some good.'

'No. Audrey doesn't care for you, and you don't care for Audrey. I can't bear conflicting elements.'

'I won't say a word that——'

'Good-bye,' interrupts Miss Lorne, with decision. 'I have seen quite enough of you for one day, considering I am bound to meet you again to-night. Till then, adieu. Yet stay ; as far as the first turn in the avenue counts, you may come with me, but not a step beyond.'

'And all this is because of Audrey ! "Oh, my cousin, shallow-hearted," how I detest you ! But for you I should be allowed to enter Paradise !'

'Go to ! Your wits wander !' says Miss Lorne. 'And if you won't come with me to that first turn, why, good-bye then until to-night.'

'Oh, I'm coming,' says Bouverie, 'to the hall door, if I may. There is no false pride about me. And about to-night ? You will not be later than ten ? You will give me the first dance ?'

'If you are in time for it.'

'Don't comfort yourself with the thought that I sha'n't be. If, on your arrival you hear of any burglar being secured in the coal-cellar for prowling about the premises during the earlier part of the evening, remember, it is I, being "in time."'

'You sha'n't stay there long after *my* arrival,' says Miss Lorne, fondly. 'With my own hands I shall release you, were there a thousand Drummonds in the way.' She slips her hand through his arm, and squeezes it confidentially. 'Do you ever think, Dick, how strange a thing it would have been if we had never met and loved?'

'A terrible thing!'

'Should we have met and loved some other people,—*odious* people!—or should we have gone to our graves unwed?'

'Unwed!' declares Dick, with conviction. 'How one event changes one's whole life. I suppose, if my uncle had not fallen over that precipice somewhere in Switzerland, you and I should now have been as apart as though two different spheres held us.'

'He was killed?' asks Dolores, with some awed interest.

'Yes. We were poor people at the time it occurred, and his death made such a tremendous difference,—gave my father the title, property, and all. I remember my uncle slightly,—a quiet man like my father, very timid, very silent, and in great awe of my grand-uncle, from whom the money came, as well as the title.'

'Why was he afraid of him?' asks Dolores, some vague contempt in her tone.

'Because the property was not entailed all through,—and an empty title is a barren honour. However, the old man died shortly after the accident that killed my uncle, and left all to my father. I think at the time it happened I was sorry about that accident; but I am not sorry now. If it had not occurred, you and I—how impossible it sounds!—would be strangers to each other.'

'Poor man! It was sad, though,' murmurs Dolores, with a sigh. A passing sigh is all the young can give to a grief of twenty years ago. 'Now here is our boundary line,' she says, standing at the curve of the avenue and holding out to him a dismissing hand. 'Not a word—not an entreaty. Your doom is sealed!'

'Well, you needn't stand so far away from me,' protests Dick, aggrieved. 'There isn't anybody looking, and therefore

nobody can see. Say good-bye to me in a more dutiful way than that.'

'You are sure—sure'—glancing nervously round—'that there is no—— Oh, Dick—there! Indeed, you should be more cautious! And—— Good-bye again!'

There are several 'agains,' and then she runs away from him down the long avenue, and is soon hidden from him by the jealous laurustinas.

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## CHAPTER XII.

One warm dream clad about with a fire as of life that endures.

Thy lips cannot laugh, and thine eyes cannot weep; thou art pale as  
a rose is. SWINBURNE.

SHE has barely time to throw off her hat, make herself a degree prettier than she was even a moment since, and enter the library by the upper door, when a servant, throwing open the lower one, announces Miss Ponsonby.

'Ah, I'm so glad I was home in time?' says Dolores, ingenuously, running to her and kissing her warmly.

Between the little heiress who has never known a grief or felt a cynical thought and the cold self-contained girl always so bitterly resentful of the poverty to which she was born, a strange friendship has arisen.

'I was so afraid I should be late; I have only just come in myself. Take off your hat.'

'You were walking?'

'Yes, with—— Yes.' She blushes faintly, and busies herself drawing forward a low lounging-chair for her visitor's comfort.

'With Dick,' says Audrey, calmly. 'Well, he is more fortunate than most.'

'Because I walked with him?' laughs Dolores, lightly, lifting her brows.

'That too. But I was not so much thinking of this hour's grace accorded him, as of the fact that probably you will let him walk through life beside you. Now, that is a speech that requires no answer. If I am right, so much the better for him. If I am wrong, why, then I can almost find it in

my heart to pity him, though his race are not altogether dear to me. What a perfect day it has been—what an evening it is !’

‘Why should we waste it in-doors ?’ exclaims Dolores, gaily. ‘The orchard is a happier hunting-ground than this can be. There may be some strawberries still left, and I’ll tell them to send us out some extra cream for them with our tea ; but perhaps’—with a hesitating glance at the cool room she has spoken of abandoning.

‘No,’ says Audrey ; ‘you need not be afraid of that. What room—even the loveliest—can bear comparison with the summer air ? “Stone walls,” so far as I am concerned, always “a prison make.”’

‘Auntie has gone to the town ; so we shall be all alone,’ says Dolores.

Slowly sauntering towards the orchard, they enter it presently through its ivied gate-way and fling themselves, with a glad sense of youth and freedom, upon a mossy bank beneath a gnarled old apple-tree.

‘How cool it is here—how quiet—no noise,’ says Audrey, clasping her arms behind her head and gazing upward at the liquid blue of the evening sky.

‘No boys !’ returns Dolores, laughing.

‘It means quite the same thing.’

‘Sometimes—just at first, when I knew you, I used to think, whenever you spoke of the boys, that you meant your brothers.’

‘No ; my mother spared me that infliction at least—

I am all the daughters of my father’s house  
And all the brothers too.

I suppose I should speak of them as “the pupils” ; but somehow “the boys,” comes more naturally. What a torment they are, what a grinding horror ! And yet’—with some remorse—‘it is a shame to be so hard on them. Sometimes—even to them—I confess I am grateful to them. They mean so much to us in many ways. Where would Dad be without his books, for instance ? The fact is, Dad and I are carnivorous animals, and live on the boys.’

‘Still, young boys I dare say are——’

‘Young !’ For an instant Miss Ponsonby glances at her ; and then she laughs faintly. ‘They aren’t always so very young,’ she says. ‘I would they were ; they would be just

half the trouble then. It is big boys that worry. We have them at seventeen, twenty, twenty-one, and so on. Once we had one at twenty-seven. He was the dullest boy of the lot—so dull indeed that I don't think he will ever be anything else. Perpetual youth is his lovely portion.'

'What became of him?' asks Dolores, who has been secretly wondering if she means Sir Chicksy, but is at last comforted by the reflection that certainly twenty-seven summers have not passed over that gentleman's flaxen head.

'We only kept him four months, as, beyond laying his exceedingly large hand and small fortune at my feet every second day and eating unlimited jam tarts, he did literally nothing.'

'How tiresome!'

'It wasn't—not exactly. He did both things so thoroughly, and always at full length under the big acacia, that he ceased to trouble us after a bit. I almost missed him and his proposals when he went. Perhaps I missed the tarts even more. He was most generous in his distribution of them.'

'Do all the boys propose to you?' asks Dolores, who is much fetched by this idea, and is regarding Miss Ponsonby with an irrepressible smile.

'Pretty nearly,' returns Audrey, with imperturbable gravity; then, all in one moment, she gives way to a merry burst of laughter very unusual to her. 'You see, Dad has the reputation of being so clever, and indeed is so clever,' with loving pride, 'that they send him all the forlorn cases as a last resource; and sometimes he does manage to push them through in spite of Dame Nature. But why they must all arrange to believe themselves in love with me is the amusing part of it.'

'It sounds amusing, certainly. Just fancy a youthful regiment on its knees to one all day long!'

'Sometimes it is unpleasant,' confesses Audrey, with a change of feature, 'sometimes'—looking earnestly at Dolores and speaking in a low tone—'they *weep*, and that's hateful! I've known them get so damp and so limp, that after indignantly refusing them, I have had to support them back to the house. And then, when they used to sit through dinner without eating a morsel, and with their eyes and noses as red as fire, Dad used to ask me what it all meant; and, when he found out, he would be very angry and want to send the luckless boy away; and of course that was awkward, you know,

as—as—well, of course you understand'—a little impatiently—'that the money the boy paid was of great importance to us.'

'Of course,' says Dolores, with the simplest, most business-like tone in the world. It soothes the other and drives the little frown from her brow.

'Whatever you do,' she says, smiling again at Dolores, 'don't encourage a lover who looks even *inclined* to cry; it will embitter your life. But I forget; my advice is not wanted here. I don't believe Dick could cry even if he tried.'

'You should know, being his cousin,' says Dolores, colouring sweetly at the mention of his name, as she always does, but looking in no wise embarrassed. 'What an irrelevant remark of yours! "What's Hecuba to me, or I to Hecuba?"'

'You alone can answer that question.' She is silent for an insignificant time, and then, reverting to her first topic, 'There is one thing redeeming,' she says, 'about the boys—they all love Dad! Even when they go away they don't forget him. But that,' with a swift brightening of her rather cold and haughty face, 'is not to be wondered at.'

'No,' returns Dolores, with a subtle touch of sympathy. 'I have seen him.'

'Does it ever occur to you,' exclaims Audrey, growing suddenly animated, 'how he can be Lady Bouverie's brother? What faintest connecting link is there between them? She so insolent, so overbearing, he so tender, so——' Her voice falls, and a beautiful dreamy expression comes into her eyes.

'Your cousin Dick was telling me to-day of how Lady Bouverie once was quite poor,' says Dolores.

'Yes; I expect the sudden unexpected rise to a title and a decent rent-roll was too much for her. She hasn't recovered it yet, you see. That word "lady" is an everlasting delight to her. I can fancy how openly glad she was when that poor man fell over that cliff, or whatever it was. I remember him myself, but very slightly—I was only a child then, a mere baby—an aimless, helpless sort of man, just like Sir George, and very good-natured. I think for the one week I knew him I lived on lollipops. Papa always speaks very kindly of him; but then he speaks kindly of his sister, Lady Bouverie, too, so that his word doesn't go for much. Yet I don't wish you to think that,' she says, smiling, 'because I would have you believe that the pretty things he says of you he really *does* mean, and that he likes you more than most.'



'It is only fair that he should like his daughter's friend,' replies Dolores, feeling strangely attracted to her because of this great love for her father that is betraying itself in every word and glance.

'There is one thing that gives me deep pleasure—one thought rather,' goes on Audrey, turning her face slowly until her eyes rest on Dolores. 'If you should chance to marry Dick, Dad will be your uncle.'

'And you my cousin.' Dolores, colouring warmly, holds out her hand to her. She smiles; and then all at once a little grim look of comic dismay desolates her face. 'And Lady Bouverie my mother-in-law!' she adds, slowly.

Audrey laughs.

'It does take the guilt off, doesn't it?' she says. Then, after a moment's silence, "'How happy some o'er other some can be!'" I wonder if Dick knows how lucky he is? It will be the happiest thing for him.'

'Why should it not be the happiest thing for me too?' asks Dolores, gently. 'We have not spoken of our engagement yet to any one, except to auntie, and now to you; but of course all the world has seen how it is with us. And I am glad they *have* seen,' with a little sudden quickening of her breath and a sudden paling of her lovely face. 'Why should one seek to hide one's joy? Yet to actually speak of it, to put it all into words, that is difficult.'

'My aunt—does she know?'

'Not yet. I told Dick to keep it a secret from his mother for yet a little while; but I suppose she has made a good guess at it. She—she has been very—one doesn't know what to call it,' breaks off Dolores, laughing, 'but very affectionate to me of late. At least that is what I am sure she has meant to be.'

'Very!' says Audrey, dryly.

'If I were to become a Cinderella to-morrow, I wonder how it would be with her then?'

'You would be "Miss Lorne" then, not her "pretty Dolores," and when she met you, it is amazing what an amount of eye-glass she would require to be able to see you, and her tone, when she "hoped you were quite well," would be sufficient to make you quite ill, and her hurried but frozen adieu would bring you to death's door; and besides——'

'The picture is complete,' interrupts Dolores, laughing. 'Your style is decidedly graphic. Let us rejoice in the fact

that I shall never be called upon to enact the rôle of a modern Cinderella. Oh, by-the-by, Audrey, I am so sorry you will not let us call for you to-night ; but you were right yesterday. In your place, I should have rejected Mrs. Drummond's invitation just as you did.'

'Every one detests me so,' says Miss Ponsonby, frowning and plucking a daisy to pieces. 'Yet what have I done to any of them ?'

'You are so much prettier than they are !'

'Yet so are you ; and they all profess—nay, they all *do* like you. There must be something morally wrong with me ; yet how to change when my fault is unknown to me ? Perhaps I should be more meek, perhaps I should have accepted Mrs. Drummond's words in a different spirit, though they were spoken at the eleventh hour, and only because the duchess thought me worth a word or two and an invitation to the castle.'

'Mrs. Drummond made a mistake ; I think you were right in showing it to her,' replied Dolores, quietly. 'Is Sir Chicksy going ?'

'About him I have been more worried than I can tell you. He declares nothing will induce him to go ; and, absurd as he looks, he is really very difficult to manage in small affairs of this kind.'

'His not going will look rather marked.'

'That is what I told him ; but he seemed to think that reason for his going only an extra inducement to stay at home.' Miss Ponsonby laughs a short joyless laugh, and gives the soft frill round her neck a vicious little pull.

'He is very much in love with you,' says Dolores, gravely ; 'and sometimes I do not understand whether that pleases or annoys you. He is a kindly young man, I know ; he—he has many—'

'Don't say good qualities !' interrupts Audrey, calmly. 'That would be the finishing stroke to whatever chance he may have.'

'Chance ! Tell me'—looking earnestly at her—'do you mean to marry him ?'

'Well, why should I not ? He is an excellent *parti*,' exclaims Audrey, defiantly ; and he has no father, or mother, or sister, or brother to consult, or to be furious with him for marrying a girl without a penny. About family there is no question,' she says, with a proud gesture, 'on either side.'

'You *think* of marrying him, then?' says Dolores, a little carefully-suppressed surprise, a little well-bred regret in her tone. She blushes up to her very brows as she asks the question, and looks abashed at her own temerity. When, a moment since, she had asked the same question in different words, she had expected the answer to be a straightforward 'No,' and had found no difficulty in propounding it. But now, as the immense truth dawns upon her that in reality Audrey may bring herself to wed Sir Chicksy, she feels strange towards her, and a little upset as to her former calculations. She hesitates,—but, as no reply comes from Audrey, something within her—something pure and true—compels her at all hazards to conquer her cowardice, or fear of giving offence. Lifting her lowered eyes, she says, impulsively, 'He is not good enough for you.'

'I wonder if I am good enough for him, or any other man?' returns Audrey, with quick bitterness. 'Do you think I care whether he be good or bad? I tell you'—leaning towards her, and pushing her dark hair in an impatient manner from her forehead—'I only care to know whether his rent-roll is really what he says it is—*that* I have ascertained to be the truth, and so no hesitation is left to me. I am mercenary; I love money; I would, I believe, sell my soul to be rich and great in the world's eyes.'

'How can you so deliberately lie about yourself?' says Dolores, calmly, though the other's suppressed excitement has its influence upon her.

'There—you see I have shocked you! Good little girls like you,' exclaims Audrey, with a reckless laugh, 'who have never known what poverty means, or the scorn society amasses, to pour broadcast upon those who lack this world's goods, cannot understand such natures as mine. Yet it is the very society of which you are a member that form such natures. I think I hate rich people!' She pauses, and then a revulsion of feeling comes to her, and she goes on again quite calmly: 'You think Sir Chicksy is not good enough for me; but you won't to-morrow, when you dwell on the knowledge of me I have now given you; and, besides—besides, he can give Dad his books—the claret that I cannot give him—the South of France—*life*!' Her voice fails her; yet, though she is as pale as death, and her eyes are heavy with miserable tears, she looks straight at Dolores frowningly, as though forbidding her to offer any sympathy.

But Dolores is not to be forbidden. Audrey has put out her hand as though to bar any approach, yet Dolores creeps up to the antagonistic hand, which is in truth but a very frail barricade, and slips her arm round Audrey's neck.

'I always thought I liked you the best of my many friends here,' she whispers softly. 'Now I know it; but—oh, dear, dear Audrey, why need you make this sacrifice? Other people are rich: other people love you.'

'Oh, no, no, no!' cries Audrey, paling and shrinking from her.

'There is one,' says Dolores, in a quick hurried tone, tightening her clasp,—'one to whom you are unkind, to whom you show yourself in all your most unlovable moods. And, as for him,—I cannot always understand him indeed; but this I know, that you are well beloved by—'

With a passionate exclamation, Miss Ponsonby, springing to her feet, pushes the girl back from her, and gazes at her from an assured distance, with crimson cheeks and flashing eyes.

'How *dare* you speak so to me?' she breathes in a low panting tone, scarcely audible. 'How dare you take such a liberty? There is no one who loves me; it is an insult—a——'

She turns abruptly away, and walks in a rapid inconsequent fashion down the garden path, increasing the distance between her and Dolores with all the speed of which she is capable. Her every movement is full of a suppressed agitation, born of passionate fear and a feeling she believes is anger, and a vague horror of herself.

Dolores, stricken dumb, stands motionless upon the mossy sward, with the boughs of the apple-tree swaying above her head, and just a glimpse of the eternal blue of heaven beyond. What has she done? What was it she said? A pang of terrible self-reproach shoots through her tender heart as she watches that tall haughty figure hurrying away from her towards the garden gate. When she has disappeared through the ivied portals will she ever return?

Pale as a small ghost, she clasps her hands together and feels as one might who has just committed a murder of the most cold-blooded description. She makes a step forward with the intention of overtaking and compelling that determined figure to believe her innocent of studied offence, when all at once Audrey pauses, hesitates, and, finally, turning sharply round, comes back to her.

'Forgive me !' she says, abruptly, her face very white. 'I should not so have spoken to you. It was rude, and, besides that, absurd. There is no real reason why you should not speak to me of him as well as of Sir Chicksy.' No name has been mentioned between them of this second suitor, yet both seem to understand. 'And I should have remembered,' continues Miss Ponsonby, 'growing even paler, 'how impossible it would be to *you* in any case to be the offender.' Great tears rise now and glisten in her eyes.

'Audrey,' whispers Dolores, going up to her and laying her arms loosely round her neck, so that she can lean back and study the other's face as she speaks, 'at least believe this of me, that my liking for you is sincere enough to prevent my saying a hurtful word to you.'

'It is the living of my whole life in this narrowed place that has spoiled me,' murmurs Audrey, faintly smiling. 'I grow more morbid, suspicious—*hateful*, if I dare confess the truth. But only to you, Dolores, will I do that. Just now you were speaking of Anthony Vyner, is it not ?'

'Yes. What fault do you find in him, that you should be so incensed with me for my bare mention of his name ?'

'The most damning fault of all—his inability to appreciate my many charms !' She laughs softly but bitterly. 'Don't say they are not many,' she goes on quickly. 'Recollect, the truth, if salutary, is always rude.' She smiles again. 'The fact is Mr. Vyner detests me nearly as much as I detest him. There is an antagonism between us that I believe only life can end. And, indeed, will it end it ? What is life, after all, but a pause, a station in our souls' journey ? Something tells me the repulsion that Mr. Vyner and I feel towards each other will last through all eternity.'

'Speak of your own repulsion,' returns Dolores, quietly : 'that is, of course, to you understood ; but Mr. Vyner's feelings are not to be so lightly canvassed. I do not think you judge him aright. You say I am wrong in believing he loves you ; I admit my error in that respect, if indeed it be one ; but that he hates you—no, no ! He certainly does not *hate* you. I think he likes you.'

A sudden passionate colour flames and dies in Miss Ponsonby's cheeks.

'How good that is of him !' she says, in a carefully modulated voice. 'Poor Anthony ! It must be an everlasting trouble to him to like me, considering how well he knows me.'

It is indeed too much. But see, Dolores, who is that coming through the arched gateway ?'

'Tea,' declares Dolores, in a gratefully explanatory, if a scarcely grammatical, manner—'and Wylde. What have you got there, Wylde ?'—addressing the grey-haired butler who is approaching them, followed by an attendant satellite.

'Small bottle of champagne, miss. Thought you'd like it with your strawberries ; tea is only just made, miss ; so it can wait a bit.'

'Oh, *thank* you, Wylde !' says Dolores, looking with tender friendship at the old man, who has followed her fortunes through the half of Europe. 'Do you know you have brought us the very thing for which Miss Ponsonby and I have been sighing ? And Wylde,' calling after him as he beats a smiling retreat, 'be sure you let me know when auntie returns.'

'Sure to, miss,' bows Wylde, with a deferential—if confidential—gesture.

## CHAPTER XIII.

Let me think yet a little : I do know  
These things were sweet, but sweet such years ago  
Their savour is all turned now into tears.

SWINBURNE.

THE day dies : vanishes into the dull past that holds our dearest secrets ; and suddenly night comes on us, covering all things.

At the stuccoed mansion of the Drummonds the fiddles are sounding, and bright forms are making the most of the glad hour accorded them. Fountains are dripping musically ; the air is heavy with the breath of dying flowers ; it is twelve o'clock, and the ball is at its height. The music grows sweeter, softer. One begins to take to heart the languorous, numerous meanings of the floating perfumed fans.

\* \* \* \* \*

Down far below in the valley, a girl, tall, but spirit-broken, is standing in an open window. She is clad in a wide clinging gown, and is gazing eagerly with great sad straining eyes at certain yellow lights that, two miles away, can yet be caught through the still haze of the summer night.

After all, was she so wise in refusing that invitation? Dolores had said she was; but—life is short! Why not take from it the very meagre enjoyment it offers to the hungry seeker after distraction? And yet—How chilly it grows. How long it seems, since last she heard the human voice that some mistaken person once called ‘divine!’

Down there—glancing at the pale yellow lights so far away—every one no doubt is happy, regardless of everything but the present moment. Ah, happy present! What more natural than that they should lose themselves in it? If she were there, she, too, doubtless, would be cruelly regardless of the outer world. But then—

\* \* \* \* \*

The night is still beyond all imaginings. The scent of the tall white lilies outside burdens the air. ‘Unpavilioned heaven is fair,’ rich in its countless stars,—

And through the dim wood Dian threads her way.

The girl leaning against the shutters of the open window sighs a little, and her beautiful haughty face takes a mournful droop. Her lips curve downwards, her eyes grow sad and moist; yet always the yellow lights gleam in the cruel distance, and almost the sound of the fiddles come to her on the ambient air. She stirs impatiently and tightens her fingers, as if unconsciously, upon the soft crimson rose with which she has been toying. It shrinks and dies beneath her pressure, and one drop of moisture, blood-red in her imagination, as though distilled from its heart, crawls over and under and through her white fingers as though in protestation against her idle deed.

But to her it is as though the rose never existed. Her eyes are ever fixed upon the lights so far removed from her, and a sense of desolation covers her. The tears gather in her eyes and blot out those vexing, shining lights—and blot out, too, the figure of a man that, advancing rapidly through the shrubbery, enters the second window, and, crossing the room, is at her side before she has time to recognise him.

It is Anthony Vyner, a little heated from his run, with his hair ruffled and quite a triumphant light in his eyes.

Audrey, moving backwards involuntarily, seizes the curtain with one hand and gazes at him in speechless amazement.

‘You?’ she whispers, breathlessly.

‘Is it?’ inquires Mr. Vyner, genially. ‘Perhaps so! No doubt you’d know. I seldom understand myself, so there

can be nothing remarkable in the fact that I don't always know myself. I thought I was at Mrs. Drummond's; but if'—with a delicate deference to her opinion—'you insist on saying this is I, why, I'll take your word for it.'

'What brought you here?' asks Audrey, who has grown very white from the suddenness of the shock his unexpected appearance has caused her.

'Now that I come to think of it,' says Mr. Vyner, airily, 'I don't know. I never go into my own motives. Long, long since I found they weren't worth it. Lovely night, isn't it?'

'What brought you?' persists Audrey, unflinchingly. There is a little flash in her sombre eyes, her hand tightens on the curtain.

'If,' says Mr. Vyner, plaintively, 'I now stated to you an incontrovertible fact, and told you the simple beautiful truth, and said it was my ten toes and my two heels, I dare say you would think me rude—eh?'

'You are always rude,' says Miss Ponsonby, calmly, 'so that goes for nothing. Still I must ask you to answer my question. What brought you here at this hour?'

'It is impossible to be sure. But I suppose it is whatever brought me here at any other hour.'

'Will you answer me or not?' demands she, angrily.

'How can I? It is so awfully hard to find out. If even "human love be not the growth of human will," how shall I know what strange force drove me abroad to-night to wander afield amidst Cimmerian darkness and meditate upon——'

'Now that you have come, and refuse a reason for your coming, I must only beg you will go again,' interrupts Audrey, haughtily.

She drops the curtain and turns disdainfully towards the door; but, when she is only half-way to it, Mr. Vyner springs to his feet and hurries after her.

'Eureka!' exclaims he, with the triumphant air of one who has proved himself victorious over some brain-worry. 'I've found it! What a fortunate thing, isn't it?'—looking to her for sympathy. 'And just at the last moment, too. Another hesitation, and I should have been—lost; you would have gone.'

'Well?' says Audrey, severely, standing a good way back from him and gazing at him with unfriendly eyes, 'well?'



It is plain she is not to be done out of the desired explanation,

‘My presence here, Miss Ponsonby,’ begins he, with an artless candour, ‘at this unseemly hour was caused, I have just discovered, by an overpowering desire to see——’

Miss Ponsonby frowns.

‘Wait a bit!’ exclaims he, hastily. ‘To see—to see anything that was far away from Mrs. Drummond! There—you cannot object to that, can you?’

‘I don’t object to anything,’ returns Audrey, just a little wearily.

She has come back to her window again, and is now leaning out towards the scented darkness, as though wooing a touch from the cool night wind. Down far below, in the woods of Greylands, the nightingales are singing their wild sweet catches, answering each other from branch to branch. It is a heavenly harmony that beats upon the heart, and seeks—as though it were the herald of peace—to enter there. But sometimes pulses throb too madly, and sad hearts are too full to admit of any new comer, whatever name he bear.

‘Yes, I was saturated with Mrs. Drummond. I thought I’d leave whilst yet there was time,’ goes on Mr. Vyner, after a brief glance at her. He too is leaning out of the window beside her, being no doubt as smitten with the beauty of the night as she is. ‘I felt, if I stayed a second later, that my hour would be come. And—as a mother-in-law now—do you think she would be nice?’

‘I never think of her,’ replies she, her head turned away from him as she gazes into the cool misty mysteries of the summer night.

‘I would that I were you,’ says Mr. Vyner. ‘She preys upon my brain; although’—with a sudden brilliant change of tone and a benignity of countenance that would have made his fortune had he begun life as a dissenting minister—‘it must be acknowledged that our dear friend is a very sweet creature, *such* an affectionate disposition, *such* a flow of soul—eh?’

‘Did anything else flow to-night?’ asks Miss Ponsonby, turning upon him suddenly, with a suspicion of wrath in her dark eyes. ‘Have you had too much of their execrable champagne? The idea would suggest itself. What occasions your high spirits—what has induced you to leave your partners to come *here*?’

'Haven't I told you?' returns Mr. Vyner, reproachfully. 'It was pure fright that drove me from the palatial halls of the people beyond. How their lamps shine through the density that parts us! Why, they put the very stars to shame! But what's the good of being a parvenu if you can't outshine your neighbours—eh? Yes, it was funk *pur et simple* that bid me beat a hasty retreat. They were all getting too fond of me—too sugary. By-the-bye, perhaps it is the old fellow's—the grandfather's—molasses that makes them all so sweet?'

'What an opinion you have of yourself!' says Audrey, with a curling lip. 'Do you indeed think that all the world is so anxious to marry you?'

'No, not *all* the world!' He looks at her fixedly, and she returns the look. 'I have the very best reasons for knowing that all the world is not so favourably disposed towards me,'—he says, presently. 'Now you, for instance'—she moves impatiently away, and a faint expression that is either amusement or uncertainty or annoyance crosses his face—'you would not, I know, deign to look at me were I to lay my allegiance at your feet.'

'That is a good thing for you to know,' returns she, coldly. 'Perhaps, if you came to the same knowledge about many other women of your acquaintance, you would find yourself on a safer level than you are at present. You think Miss Drummond——'

'I don't *think* that; I am sure of it. When she had for the third time done me the honour to ask me to be her partner, I felt I must run for it. And then I thought I'd come down here and ask you what she meant.'

'Even if she did make up her mind to marry you,' says Miss Ponsonby, surveying him with leisurely contempt, 'she would be miles too good for you.'

'That's just what I thought,' smiles he, equably, 'so I flew. "Never," said I to myself, "shall I be the cause of bringing down misery upon the head of this admirable girl. Were I to be the means of rendering her unhappy, I should never forgive myself. No, even though the determination cost me my life, I will be generous in this matter; I will *not* marry her!" And then, as you know, I arrived here in a state of mind bordering upon coma. You may remember I couldn't give you so much as a decent answer to a most simple question. You recollect that?—I say, Audrey,

couldn't we find some supper somewhere? I'm right down hungry; self-denial of the sort I have just described and suppressed affection and all that sort of thing is very exhausting, and—er—very appetising.'

'Certainly not,' says Miss Ponsonby, with stern decision. 'If you want supper, go back to Mrs. Drummond.'

'Not if I were starving! Do you think I'd risk Georgina's blandishments again? Don't be brutal, Miss Ponsonby. 'Tis ill fighting with an hungry man. What had you for dinner?'

'Roast beef,' confesses she, reluctantly.

'Cold roast beef,' says he, meditatively, 'Worcester sauce! fresh bread-and-butter! It might be worse—*far* worse! Come along'—jovially tucking his arm *bon camarade* fashion into hers—'and we'll make a night of it!'

'Come—*where*? ' demands she, making an ineffectual effort to untuck herself. Evidently 'Dad's' old boy is not to be lightly got rid of.

'Into the pantry, of course,' returns he, unabashed.

'You have made a mistake,' says Miss Ponsonby, stubbornly resolved not to yield an inch. 'Into the pantry I don't go. Go back to the Drummonds!'

'I have told you already why I can't. Would you thrust me into the arms of Georgina? Is this your vaunted affection for me?'

'Affection! For *you*!' Exclaims she regarding him with withering scorn.

'You would deliberately fling me into the prepared pit-fall? Was it for this you kept Chaucer at home? I dare-say you knew, if he had been there, my danger would not only have been lessened, but have been *nil*! A baronet is dearer to their souls than a commoner could ever be. A title counts. Your studied cruelty is more than I can bear. Would you have me *marry* Georgina?'

'I don't care whom you marry,' exclaims she, with a passionate stamp of her foot; 'only go away.'

'I can't,' says Mr. Vyner, sinking into a chair, 'I'm too far gone. The walk home would be much too much for me. Do you think "Dad," if he knew it, would send me hungry from his door?'

At this she struggles wildly with a rising force within her, and at last they both burst out laughing. It does her good. When the small paroxysm is over, she sighs heavily, and looks at him.

'By-the-bye, where *is* Dad?' asks he.

'In bed—two hours ago.'

'Sleeping the sleep of the just, no doubt; if not, no one ever did it. And Sir Chicksy?'

'In bed too, I trust.'

'So do I. For once we are agreed. And an excellent place it is for him. I hope his dreams are rose-coloured. I'm so fond of Chaucer that I'd always have him in bed, if I couldn't have him in heaven. Are the servants in bed also?'

'Yes.'

'Do you mean to say'—with a quick glance at her pale profile—'that you have been keeping a lonely vigil here for nearly three hours?'

'I didn't find it lonely. Do you think,' with an angry contraction of her brows, 'that I am a child or a fool, to be terrified by the mere fact of being alone?'

'Ah, true. I forgot that mind of yours—the amazing strength of it. But even that, I suppose, cannot keep you from feeling the pangs of hunger at times? Do say you could eat something now, if only to please me.'

In truth the girl is looking very wan and tired and disheartened, in spite of her efforts at control.

'If I am not, you are,' she says, evasively. 'Come to the pantry, then, since you won't go back to Mrs. Drummond. As you say,' wistfully, 'I suppose Dad would not like you to leave his house hungry.'

'I expect "Dad" is my saving clause. *You* have no bowels of mercies. Never mind; I forgive you. By the way, why didn't Sir Chicksy turn up at the Drummonds' to-night?'

'Because I declined to go.'

'Well done himself! Now who says "men are deceivers ever—constant to one love never?" William Shakespeare, I despise you! Your supposed knowledge of human nature is a big swindle. But stay—I forget. He never knew our Chicksy, that perhaps accounts for it. I say, Audrey, you've got a new lock to the pantry since I was here! The last one, at least, the one that I knew, used to wobble—*so*! Remember? By-the-by, I'm not a bit surprised, you know, that Sir Chicksy is so head over ears in love with you.'

'No? Neither am I,' returns Miss Ponsonby, indifferently.

'Good girl!' murmurs Mr. Vyner.

Whereupon, Audrey, stirred by some secret emotion, breaks into a low gay laugh, a laugh very different from the mirth of a moment since, which indeed had been half vexatious. She is of those people whose laughter is infrequent, and therefore her mirth, when heard, is more infectious than that of most

'Dear me!' exclaims Mr. Vyner, with concern, gazing at her with exaggerated amazement. 'Are you ill? Has anything hurt you?'

'No; but yet my laughter has done me good; it has opened my heart. To prove it, I will confess that if you unfasten the door of the safe over there, you will find, not only the beef I spoke of, but a chicken.'

'Ye gods,' cries Mr. Vyner, 'why don't you come down from Olympus?' He opens the door of the safe. 'And a very nice plump chicken too!' he remarks, admiringly. 'After all, I'm rather glad the gods have not responded to my call. It will just be enough for you and me.'

Miss Ponsonby has covered the small table near her with a white cloth and with the most astonishing rapidity. Not the very faintest suspicion of *mauvaise honte* is discernible in her movements—not even the knowledge that at Mr. Vyner's own home servants in livery perform for him all such services as these, has the power to render her awkward or self-conscious. Anthony Vyner was for too many years one of 'the boys'—even though, during his time, she was but a tall, slender, impetuous child, only half conscious of the existence of anything save fruits and flowers—to be ever considered a stranger by her, no matter how antagonistic she may feel towards him now that the waves of time have rolled a little farther on.

Just at this moment he is on his knees before a small cupboard, searching it diligently for something that evidently is not there. To even an unobservant looker-on it might suggest itself that it is not the first time he and she have supped together in this pantry.

'You won't find them there,' declares Audrey at last, becoming aware, after a prolonged patting of her cloth to take out certain creases, that her guest is still sprawling on the floor in his evening-clothes and with his head lost in the dim recesses

of the cupboard. 'We always keep the forks and spoons in the big press now.'

'Do you?' says Vyner, scrambling to his feet once more. 'So much the better; an affair like this, with its lower shelves almost on the ground, is very trying, and, besides, it is such a rickety old thing.'

'It is not a bit more rickety now than it was—then,' says Miss Ponsonby, in an offended tone; yet there is just now a little softness about her anger that would have been foreign to her in more orthodox moments.

'Not a bit, not a bit!' acquiesces he, cheerfully. 'As you say, I defy it to be more unstable now than it was *then*: then!' repeats he with a sigh—is it a real sigh or only part of his usual idle careless manner, that is never more than half earnest? 'What a very dear little girl you were,' he says, 'in that pleasant far-off "then"!''

'There is one thing I would say to you,' says Miss Ponsonby, standing very still and very upright at the other side of the table, with a salt-cellar in one hand and a mustard-pot in the other, 'and I would have you remember it for all your days; it is this: I object to compliments in every shape and form, whether they refer to my past, my present, or my future. You will be so good as never to forget that.'

'I shall be so good;' returns Mr. Vyner, amicably, who, for his part, is armed with a loaf of bread, a carving-knife, and a decanter; 'I promise you most faithfully *never to forget*!'

There is a faint depth in his tone that causes her to glance at him suspiciously; just then, as it happens, he too is looking at her; her brows contract.

'No, really,' he goes on, gaily, 'there is no occasion for distrust: I mean it—I sha'n't forget, *ever*. That is obeying you, is it not? And fortunately my memory is excellent. Why, it seems to me now only as yesterday since I, an overgrown lad, used to carry you for miles through heather and stubble, and think myself richly rewarded at the last if you—what a little tyrant you were!—would give me a kiss for my reward.'

'Ah!' says the girl. She lays her hand upon the back of a chair then gazes at him with a pale face and with an expression of concentrated wrath within her eyes.

'Well, what if you did kiss me then?' persists he, with a little laugh, lifting his brows. 'You were but a wilful child of nine, and you don't kiss me now, worse luck'—laughing again—'so why look at me like that? But come to supper, I en-

treat you, with what appetite we may. By-the-bye, how is it with you ?

'I feel as if I hadn't eaten anything for a week,' confesses Audrey : with a sudden revulsion of feeling she finds herself smiling back at him. After all, what is to be gained by encouraging disdain or nursing one's wrath for a creature so indifferent to one's love or hatred ? And, besides, what comes of one's joys and griefs ? An end once attained, how poor it appears ! All life's big designs are so many glittering myths only put forward to tempt one to a betrayal of one's sad weaknesses, to show up the very poverty of one's so-called strength. She will forget for a little hour her cares, her secret sorrow that is scarce acknowledged even to her own heart, that little dread about 'Dad's' health—*everything*, and take the good the moment gives. 'Just imagine if Mrs. Drummond were to see you now,' she says, with a bright eager light upon her beautiful face that is very seldom seen there, 'despising her ball, her guests, her——'

'Daughter ! the fond Georgina—and all for you ! *There* would lie the sting. I'm only sorry for one thing,' says Mr. Vyner, thoughtfully ; 'and I must say it was amiss of me ; why on earth didn't I think of secreting a bottle of her champagne about my portly person before quitting her ancestral bowers ?'

A little shade falls on Audrey.

'Ah !' she says. 'You see you should have stayed there ; you would have had a so much better supper.' A vivid fixed crimson springs into her cheek ; an expression that may be termed shy creeps into her downcast face. It is not so easy, in spite of strong resolution, to forget that terrible bugbear the want of money.

'You don't often make silly speeches,' remarks Mr. Vyner, calmly, after a long minute's silence spent in contemplation of that wonderfully new and pretty diffidence upon the face opposite ; 'but just now you have managed it. Let me assure you that the supper is not known upon earth, that would tempt me from the one now before me.'

She makes him no answer ; and again he loses himself in a lengthened study of her expression. To make an analytical examination of every character that may come beneath his notice has been his almost unconscious habit for many years. And what a programme she has presented him with to-night, what a hurried list of most of the deeper emotions—dignity,

gaiety, reproach, anger—and, after all, this strange sweet embarrassment that has fallen upon her, this most childish of all the emotions, this girlish shyness, this last phase of her varied humours has suited her best. How pretty she looks, how beautifully white are her hands, how—Pshaw!

‘To return to our first thought,’ he says lightly, ‘You were wondering what Mrs. Drummond would say if she could now look in upon me. I turn the tables upon you, madam. I ask you how would it be were Sir Chicksy at this awful juncture to look in upon you?’

‘Well, what if he did?’—coldly.

‘I’d be afraid to think. Would he—you know him well!—would he murder me? Fancy an apparition of Sir Chicksy standing in yonder doorway armed with a claymore,—he is a Scotch baronet, is he not?—and with a dangling night-cap on his sunny head! By-the-bye, he wears a night-cap, doesn’t he?’ He pauses, and gazes at her as if for information.

‘What!’ Miss Ponsonby stares at him, considerably taken aback by his rather suggestive question; then—‘I’m sure I don’t know!’ she says, indignantly.

‘Then, as none of us know, I’m absolutely positive he does,’ declares Mr. Vyner, unmoved. ‘A *high* one, generously tasselled. I believe it would be a tassel that would bob over his aristocratic nose—a most confounding tassel, of abnormal stoutness and unparalleled length. I feel I should go down before it—I should go—’

‘Go home?’ suggests Miss Ponsonby.

‘Oh, not yet! Do not make your gentle hint more apparent; I have not yet half finished this paragon among chickens. Now tell me why you would not go to Mrs. Drummond’s to-night.’

‘First, because she did not choose to ask me until she found the duchess was in my favour. But the joke of this part of my story lies in the fact that she might quite as well have given me my invitation at the proper moment, as I should undoubtedly at any time have refused it.’

‘But why—why?’—a little impatiently.

Because I could not so

Be drest

As I were going to a feast,

replies she, with a faint flush. ‘I might perhaps have got the money to buy a new gown, if I had asked Dad for it, at the



expense of his denying himself half a dozen of the little trivial things that go to make his life sweet. He would give me every penny he possesses ; he would probably sell some of his dearest possessions—his books—to get me a few yards of muslin in which to pretend to enjoy myself for an hour or two. But do you think I should enjoy those two hours, knowing how they were procured ? What a purgatory they would be !

‘They would indeed,’ says Vyner, softly. He does her full justice in this matter at least. He understands perfectly the loyalty of the affection that could find no happiness in a pleasure secured at the expense of one beloved.

‘The boys are bother enough to him,’ she goes on, regretfully. ‘Why should I add to his worries ? At this affair at the duchess’s it will be different, as she has insisted upon giving all the dresses, and we are to wear our stage-costumes during the evening. But you now see’—with a wavering smile—‘that I could not have gone to-night, though my very heart had been set upon it.’

There is silence for a full minute ; then Mr. Vyner, pushing back his chair with a rather ungovernable haste, rises to his feet.

‘The scales of this world are too uneven,’ he says, in a low voice. ‘One has everything that he wants, and then wants everything, whilst others—have nothing—and—and there are those who would alter this injustice—yet dare not !’

He lifts his eyes to hers with an effort.

‘No, they dare not,’ returns she, very distinctly.

‘It seems past belief hard that, when you have so few enjoyments, you should be denied even one.’

‘This one would not have been an enjoyment. Console yourself with that thought. Even you’—with an expressive gesture and a smiling glance at the impromptu supper-table—‘did not find it so.’

‘But any break in upon your monotony should count.’

‘Tut !’ says she, shrugging her shoulders with the vehement half-foreign gesture she has inherited from her mother. ‘Monotony is a thing for which we must all prepare ourselves.

We dance like fairies in a ring, and  
Our whole life is but a nauseous tautology.

‘And now—good night.’ She holds out her hand to him.

‘Come with me at least as far as the hall door,’ entreats he.

Throwing wide the door when they come to it, they let in a flood of moonlight that brightens up the sombre hall and lies in a silver pathway across the gravel. The stars have come out even more brilliantly in the clear sky, and a soft wind buffets Audrey's cheeks as she steps into the pale porch hung with sleeping roses, whose perfume makes sweet the passing hour. A few thin luminous clouds crossing the horizon darken it momentarily ; otherwise the tranquil expanse of heaven is undisturbed.

'I suppose I shall see you to-morrow at the castle about these rehearsals ?' says Vyner, holding her hand.

'Who shall say ?' returns she, stepping back from him and releasing her fingers,—

To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow—  
It is a period nowhere to be found,  
Unless perchance in the fool's calendar.

She moves away from him, the moonlight following and catching amorously at the trailing folds of her soft gown. At the door, almost as she is lost in the enfolding darkness of the house beyond, she looks back at him and waves her hand. One ray from Diana's throne, more venturesome than the rest, falls into her liquid eyes as they turn slowly to where he still is standing on the gravel. Are there tears in them ? Again she makes him that mute adieu, and then is gone.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

But thine eyes are  
As May skies are,  
And thy words like spoken roses.  
Sing while he may, man hath no long delight.

SWINBURNE.

'Ah ! You, Dick ?' says Dolores, with a little fond flush and a gesture of glad surprise. She has stepped through the armoury door that opens upon the western end of the garden, to find herself almost in her lover's arms.

The sun, shining generously upon all things, is dancing attendance in quite a pointed fashion upon the soft cream-coloured folds of the Indian silk in which she has encased her

dainty body, and is revelling in her sunny locks and in her happy innocent eyes.

Lace ruffles of an olden day come barely to her elbow ; but long Suede gloves of a pale colour lie in pretty wrinkles upon her rounded arms. Of a hat she is guiltless, disdaining it in this glorious weather ; but her lovely face looks up at him from under a cream-tinted umbrella that acts as an aureola round a face so pure, so calm, so sweet, as to be almost saint-like.

'Oh, love,' says Bouverie to himself, as he gazes mutely at her exceeding beauty, 'what am I that I should have gained, not only your pure face, but your heart that is even still more pure !' To make sound of the secret workings of our hearts is fortunately rare with most of us ; so that what Dick really does say to Dolores has nothing whatever to do with the adoration for her of which his soul is full.

'You have guessed aright,' returns he, gaily, taking and holding the little hand she so readily extends. 'But why this blush, Miss Lorne, and why this suspicious confusion, and why this very fetching array ? If I am in the way—if I am to come under the head of "trumpery," say so, and, whilst there is yet time, let me depart with my broken heart.'

'I think I see you going—even then,' says Miss Lorne, making him a contemptuous little *moue*. 'But my gown—do you really like it ? I—I—fancied you might come up this afternoon ; and Lallie'—a little shyly—'says I look so nice in it that I thought I'd show it to you. But I didn't dream you would be here so early.'

'You *should* have dreamt it, then ; you should never dream of anything but me !'

'Perhaps I did not dream at all.'

'A paltry way of getting out of it. Be it known to you, madam, that, according to some great thinkers, the brain is never idle ; and so, in your sleeping moments, dreams of something or some one must have entered into it.'

'But I wasn't asleep,' drawing up her brows. 'Now where does your argument go to—eh ? Bah ! What a goose you are !' All this she says with the most open and flagrant want of respect, and, having said it, she slips her hand into his, and rubs her soft cheek up and down in kittenish fashion against his sleeve. 'What a sweet day it is,' she says, in a little sighing whisper, 'and how happy I am !'

A passionate tenderness floods the young man's face.

'Really—*really*?' he whispers back to her. 'I can then make you happy?'

'Dick,' says she, with a sudden change of tone. Her smile fades; with a little clinging half-frightened gesture she slips her arms around him, 'I hope I am not too happy,' she sighs. 'When people are too happy—what then?' She trembles.

'Nonsense!' exclaims he, rather roughly, but pressing her slender form very close to him. 'No one is too happy. What ridiculous fancies you get into your head! And even if one were, why, one would go on being so, of course. And now let me look at your gown'—putting her a small way back from him. 'How charming—how delicious! It is—yes it really is worthy even of you!'

'What a base flatterer!' protests she, recovering her spirits and laughing gaily. 'And now tell me what brought you up here "in the morning, oh, so early?"'

'I hardly know. I felt restless, unsettled, and as though I must see you once again. I thought a decent visiting-hour would never arrive that I might start for Greylands. Oh, for the time,' exclaims Bouverie, drawing her hand through his arm as they walk along together through the scented beds of roses, and giving it a loving squeeze out of the fulness of his heart, 'when I need not go visiting you at all! When the longest journey from me to you will be from the stables or the library to your boudoir.'

'Ah, I often think of that,' says Dolores, with such sudden, sweet, genuine good faith that, regardless of consequences and the long line of windows, he stoops and kisses her upon the spot.

'How did you enjoy last night?' asks she.

It is the morning after Mrs. Drummond's ball.

'Altogether, when dancing with you; not at all otherwise. The whole affair was slow, I thought. It dragged: it wanted something.'

'It wanted Audrey,' says Dolores. 'I missed her more than I can tell you.'

'Did you? The rest of us missed Vyner. Where on earth did he disappear to? He never put in an appearance until twelve, and was no sooner come than gone. Mrs. Drummond was furious about it—at least, so Mrs. Wemyss told me—and so was "my sweet girl"' (Mrs. Drummond's open-air name for her daughter).

'Dick,' says Dolores, giving him the gentlest suspicion of a

little pinch, 'how dare you call any one "sweet" but me? But what was Mr. Vyner's reason for his strange behaviour? He came up to me and spoke to me for a moment, looking very handsome but very cross, and——'

'Dolores,' interrupts Dick, 'how dare you call any one "handsome" but me! As to Vyner, I believe he was afraid Miss Drummond would do him the honour to propose to him.'

'He doesn't seem to me to care for any one, does he?' asks Dolores, making her assertion with all the air of one who hopes and expects to be contradicted.

'No; Vyner is not a marrying man,' assents Dick. He is looking the other way, so does not notice the quick shade of disappointment that crosses the face of his little companion at his words. 'Regular old bachelor, I should say! I couldn't imagine him writing sonnets to his mistress's eyebrow, for example, or otherwise playing the fool.'

'Then you really think,' murmurs Dolores, a little plaintively, 'that if a man honestly loves a woman, as—as—you say you love me, he must necessarily play the—the fool?'

'Now, once for all,' says Mr. Bouverie, promptly, 'let me lay down the law for you on this point—*our* law. You and I, to begin with, are altogether different from the rest of the world. If I choose to crawl in an abject fashion at your feet; to feel really obliged to you if you would trample upon me, to know the most intense inward gratification if you ask me to perform the smallest service for you—such as cutting my throat, or anything of that sort—if, in short, I feel it a finer thing to be your slave than any other woman's king: why, all that is not folly; it is merely what is fit and proper between you and me. But in anybody else it would be—— Well, my judgment is not always sound, but I daresay it might be considered a little weak. But not in *me*, remember, because you are you, and there is no one in all the world to be compared with you—see?'

'No, I don't see at all!' exclaims his paragon, with startling decision and a somewhat grievous note in her voice. 'I never listened to such folly? And you must know I don't want you to crawl, Dick, just like a horrid worm, and that I wouldn't trample upon you for anything you could offer!'

'Well, never mind,' says Bouverie, airily; 'let us go on to the next paragraph. Did you ever see any one so in love as Bruno?'

'With Mrs. Wemyss? It is as apparent as the day! And

I'm very——' She stops short and glances at him from under the huge umbrella. 'Are *you* glad about it?' she asks, anxiously.

'If she will have him—yes, very!'

'Then so am I,' declares Dolores, with an adorable smile and an air of deep relief. 'And as to *having* him, I know she will! Her eyes! Did you ever watch her eyes when she is looking at Bruno and he doesn't know it?'

'I have better eyes than hers to watch,' says Dick; 'your eyes.'

'Then you must be for ever looking in the glass,' says she, with mock reproach—they have seated themselves upon a mossy mound, and as she speaks she takes his chin into the hollow of her little palm and compels him to look at her—'because your eyes are mine now, and mine yours. Oh, you conceited boy! Out of your own mouth I condemn you.'

She laughs a soft tuneful laugh, in which he joins.

'What book is that in your pocket?' asks Dolores, drawing it into fuller view as she speaks. 'Swinburne? Come, read something to me! You read well, and your voice is the sweetest in the world for me.'

'It—it's not always easy to get a thing one likes out of him,' says Mr. Bouverie, with mild confusion.

'Go on! Read me the first thing your eyes may light upon. Do you know I have never read any of his works, though I have read a great deal *of* him, and know that the praise of him is unlimited. Go on.'

She leans back lazily, and clasps her hands behind her sunny head.

'Well, but I hardly know what to choose,' protests Bouverie, vaguely.

'I have told you. Open at hap-hazard, and begin at the very first line your eyes may meet.'

With a mental reservation, Mr. Bouverie proceeds to obey her. There is comfort in the thought that he can let the book fall in the most carelessly accidental manner possible if his first glance at the printed page is not—er—that is—well, exactly to his liking. He opens the book, his eyes fall upon the page, he obeys her order, and reads from the first line they meet—

The time of lovers is brief,  
From the fair first joy to the grief  
That tells when love is grown old,  
From the warm wild kiss to the cold;

From the red to the white rose-leaf  
They have but a season to seem  
As rose-leaves lost on a stream,  
That part not and pass not apart,  
As a spirit from dream to dream,  
As a sorrow from heart to heart.

He would have gone on ; but a low sigh escaping from her stops him.

“The time of lovers is brief.” Is that true ?’ she asks, ‘*Must* it be true ? Alas, what a sad song you chose !’

‘I did not choose it,’ exclaims he earnestly. ‘I was to read the very first thing——’

‘Yes, yes. And how unlucky !’ says she, dreamily. ‘Did he know ? Will it be true in our case ?’

‘My darling, no ! Dolores, look at me. Is it me you fear, or is it yourself ? I shall not be flattered if it is the latter. My dear, dear heart, nothing shall part us, never—never ! What ! are you superstitious, you silly child, and depressed because of a few words that can have nothing to do with you or me ?’

‘It *is* foolish, isn’t it ?’ she says, smiling languidly. Yet I doubt the fulfilment—the continuance of my happiness ; at times you know—*only* at times. There seems ever to be a cloud above me.’ She draws her breath quickly, and by a swift light action makes an expressive illustration of her meaning over her head. Then her little frail hands drop into her lap again—hands so frail that the many diamonds and pearls that cover them—his gifts—seem to weigh them down.

‘I wish you were not so fragile,’ says Bouverie, paling a little. ‘If you were stronger, no such morbid thoughts would distress you. What a little hand ! How warm it is—how listless ! And how pale you are ! You seem to me as unlasting as the dew.’

‘No, no ! do not liken me to the dew,’ murmurs she, softly, ‘I should have to leave you then, and so soon—so soon ! Why, what a little life you would give me !’

He has his arms round her, and, as she says this, she turns her face to his in caressing fashion. But there is something in her tone—her light words—that tortures him. He does not speak, but in a little agony of love and fear presses his lips to her pretty hair.

‘No, I am like white violets. You remember ? They are what you first told me I resembled. I will not have your first

fancy slighted, or changed.' She pauses for a moment ; and then, as though half unconsciously, the next words fall from her lips, "Violets for a maiden dead."

'Dolores,' exclaims he, sharply, putting her almost angrily from him and springing to his feet, 'I forbid you to talk like that—do you hear?—*I forbid you!*'

'I was not talking,' returns she, a little startled. 'It was only a thought that came to me. But it shall be as you wish'—holding out her hands to him—'I shall never even think of that line again if I can prevent myself. Come back to me, Dick.'

Of course he comes back to her ; but there is still a great sadness in his face, born of vague fear and an undefined possibility too cruel to be brought into a more forcible light. Ever since his heart first woke to a knowledge of its love, his affection for her has been tinged with a nervous dread of something—intangible but terrible—that may arise to part him from her, or her from him. Even in small things he has found food to sustain this lover's torment. A sudden pallor arising from the extra sultriness of a summer day, and he would believe her dying ; a little natural pretty languor, and his spirits died within him. There was indeed one day in which she had had a cold—a very slight cold, a mere trifling affair—when he told himself his heart was broken !

His love for this gentle, beautiful creature is an idolatry—keen and sweet, and redolent of all things pure. In her is centred every hope he has, every thought, every dream of a happy future.

'Your mind is still wandering away from me,' she says presently, in a half-jealous tone, marking the shade upon his brow. 'Are you thinking'—looking at him with a sudden smile—'of my "cloud," my "little rift" ? I think of it too ; but nothing comes of my thought. I don't know what it is. All my life I have lived with it ; but'—with a comical gesture of despair—'I know less of it to-day than any one. It is not death—of that I am *sure* ; but that is all.'

'Are you ?' asks Bouverie, in a low tone, his voice rather husky. 'Can any one be sure ? What—what did your mother die of—your father ?'

'Of no disease that might fall upon me—nothing hereditary. Auntie has assured me of that, and auntie never lies. No, it will not be death ; but sometimes it is borne in upon me that it may be—*grief*.'



She pauses for a moment, and then, turning towards him with a sweet trust within her eyes, lays her hand on his.

'Since I have met you I have cared less for that thought,' she says; 'I shall have you to share it with me.' Then suddenly another, a new fear seems to strike her; she turns pale. 'But what if you could not share it?' she says.

'Well, then I should be out of the land of the living,' returns he, cheerily, pressing the hand he holds to his lips. 'Nothing but my final departure from this present world could prevent my sharing with you both your griefs and joys. What is my life for, unless it be to make yours happier?' Then he quotes a little tender verse to her very tenderly:—

Being your slave, what should I do but tend  
Upon the hours and times of your desire?  
I have no precious time at all to spend,  
Nor services to do, till you require.

But why worry yourself at all, my darling, about an unknown woe that may be—nay, that must be—purely imaginary?'

'It is not that,' she returns, slowly shaking her head. 'I have felt the shadow of it too long to disbelieve in it; yet I have never sought to solve its mystery. Why should I? Some day I shall know; but the farther off that day is the better. Come, let us forget it!' exclaims she, gaily, throwing up her charming head with a sudden pretty impatience that suggests a desire for freedom from unpleasing reflection. 'There are moments when I cannot know discontent, and this is one of them. I have the glad sunshine, the long sweet day before me, and, above and beyond all, *you*!' She bends towards him impulsively, and gives him, of her own loving accord, a soft caress. 'I am always happy on a sunny day like this. See,' cries she, suddenly, 'look at that butterfly! What a beauty!'

She springs to her feet; all her late touch of languor, her pensive glances, have vanished; she is a careless child again, ignorant of secret care or sorrow.

'There he is,' she whispers, cautiously but hopefully, stealing towards the rose-bush whereon the child of the sun she has so fancied is resting with quivering wings. But, light as her footfall is, it startles the pretty winged trifter; and, spreading itself, it soars aloft, far, far, beyond her reach, and hurrying sunward—as it were 'a flower that floats on air'—is soon lost even to sight. 'How provoking!' cries she, with a gay laugh.

'You saw how it eluded me? Ah, my hand has lost its cunning. There was a time—not so long ago either—when I should have been as good as him, pretty little wretch! That was when I wore sun-bonnets; those great big muslin things, you know, like white coal-scuttles. But of late years I—— Well,' quickly, 'it is not correct to run about so much when one is quite grown-up—is it, now?'

She seats herself beside him once again, and pushes her fingers into his.

'Let me tell you your fortune,' she says, stooping to pluck a great-eyed marguerite growing at her feet.

'My future is told. I shall wed you, and live happy ever afterwards.'

'Perhaps you won't,' retorts she, wilfully. 'Well, let us see—this year—next——'

He lays his hand over the flower.

'See if you love me first. How could there be any true fortune unless there was love in it?' he protests, reproachfully.

'I forgot,' murmurs she. 'Our love seems so sure, so certain a thing that—— Now attend.' She goes through the old-world formula. "'She loves you—a little, indifferently, passionately—not at all,'" plucking carefully leaf by leaf the doomed marguerite as all true lovers have done before her time out of mind. It stops at 'She loves you.'

'And that is the best of all,' she assures him, with a little nod. 'If I love you, as you know I do, it means everything. Good little flower! Now I shall put you through your facings, Dick, and see if all your loving oaths are true, or if perchance you have "protested too much."'

But the second flower is faithful as the first, and gives its last petal to the self-same words that ended the life of its comrade.

'Is not that charming?' laughs Dolores, her eyes gleaming with real pleasure. 'Who shall say there is no truth in these things? Bah! They are sceptics who have no right to breathe the air with us. And was not this poor flower—after all, I am sorry I killed it!—even more worthy than its predecessor? It might have been a proud flower disinclined to follow another's lead; yet, you see, it conquered its pride, overcame its inclinations, and, like a good Christian, adhered strictly to the truth.'

'It is my turn now,' declares Bouverie, gaily, plucking

another flower. 'I shall see when we shall be married. If it doesn't say this year, I shan't believe in that strict adherence to the truth of which you have been boasting.'

'You must believe what it tells you,' says Dolores leaning over his shoulder to watch his manipulation of the flower and see that there is no foul play. 'Go on!'

"This year, next year, three years—never!"

They both grow rather anxious as the last petals are approached, and, when they cease upon the fatal 'never,' they are silent, and for a moment refuse to look at each other.

'It is all nonsense,' exclaims Bouverie at last, flinging the stalk from him with an angry movement, 'utterly insane rubbish! Let us try it again, if only to prove the absurdity of it.'

'No, no,' staying his hand. 'If, as you say, it is nonsense, why try to prove it so? Of course there is nothing in it—and yet——'

'Well—what?' demands he, defiantly.

'Perhaps it did tell us the truth—perhaps we never shall be married? Who can tell what lies before us!'

'A long life together,' declares he, stoutly. 'Little raven that you are, I will not listen to your croaking! And, as for those marguerites, I shall hate them for ever and ever!'

'Even though they whispered to you of my love?' reminds she, gently. 'Poor things! I requited them but ill—to give me pleasant tidings they died!'

'Was their last message, then, so pleasant?' asks he, with a short laugh. 'Pshaw! Why take the trouble to even think of it?'

'Still, I wish it had said something else—even that long three years.' She turns her eyes upon him with a little troubled glance in their soft depths. 'Sometimes foolish things, like these marguerites, do truly foretell the future by a mere silly chance, as it were. What if we *should* be parted? What if—with a very sad and wistful attempt at a smile—that "little rift" of mine should be the means of——'

'Dolores, *Dolores*,' cries he, losing all self-control, 'can you really love me and talk thus coldly of even an impossible parting? The very word means death to me! What should I do without you? In all this wide world where should I find me a place? I tell you that heart and soul I am so wrapped up in you that there could be for me, without you, no such thing as existence. Without you!' he repeats his own words with

such a mournful cadence and in such despairing tones that involuntarily she draws nearer and throws her arms round his neck. 'What words!' he says, in a low tone. 'But they have no meaning—none!' He presses her more closely to his heart. 'Darling—my beloved,' he whispers, 'say once again that you love me! Let me hear you say it!'

'I love you!' returns she, with an intensity that satisfies him.

They cling to each other in silence. Is there some faint touch of despair in that mute embrace? No word escapes them. From across the far lawn there comes the sighing of the chestnut leaves, and in the scented wind are subtle whispers that no man may learn, but that all sad hearts must feel. Over everything lies the odorous breath of the dying roses.

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## CHAPTER XV.

In yesterday's reach and to-morrow's  
Out of sight as they lie of to-day,  
There have been and there yet shall be sorrows.  
For the crown of our life as it closes  
Is darkness, the print thereof dust.

SWINBURNE.

TIME, the tyrant, rushing ever onwards, brings to us what was once 'to-morrow,' but is now known by its new name of to-day. A day far spent, as already evening has come and gone and night is at hand.

A night fraught with many emotions—weal for some and woe for others, and change—and loss of that dear hope that makes our sad life glad.

It is the night set apart for the theatricals at the castle; perhaps most of the actors therein feel some natural nervousness as the hour draws nigh to cast them unfriended before the British public, as represented by the society of Deadmarsh and the surrounding country. For Dolores, however, the hour has no terror. Standing before the mirror in which her charming image is depicted, lost in a happy reverie in which Dick alone has place, she is hopefully wondering whether he will be pleased with her costumes, and if indeed in this present one she will seem good in his sight. In many ways she is still

but a child, and the longing to seem fair to her lover is a very paramount feeling with her. No part has been assigned her in the play that is to open the proceedings at the castle ; but she is to appear in the tableaux later on in some character unknown to all save those who are behind the scenes. Even to her aunt—Miss Maturin—she has been forbidden to reveal the secrets that are to be kept sacred until the night of representation.

It is a very charming reflection that meets her gaze as she glances thoughtfully into the mirror—fair shining eyes and pretty yellow locks and small mouth soft and sensitive, lovely dimpled arms bare to the shoulder, and a throat of marvellous beauty. She seems to rise out of the white lace that enshrouds her like a very dream of rapturous childhood hardly as yet awakened to a knowledge of the world's storm. A string of priceless pearls encircles her neck, her only ornament, save the diamonds that flash upon her little snowy hands. There is glad expectancy in her glance and in the smile that curves her lips, this smile widening with some happy thought of him who fills her being ; her lips part, and suddenly, with a suspicion of coquettish shyness most sweet to see, she covers her face with her hands.

There is no touch of sun or fallen rain  
That ever fell on a more gracious thing.

'Hah, conceited baby ! At last I have caught you,' exclaims Miss Maturin, entering her room, 'standing in an entranced attitude before your glass. And indeed'—with loving admiration—'no wonder ! Darling child ! That gown suits you *so* ! You look just like a picture.'

'Of what ? Prosperity ?' asks Dolores, with a laugh full of amusement, as she remembers how she will have to enact the other side of the picture very shortly. But that is a secret known only to her and the duchess and a very select few.

'No, no ; as—— But I must not make you vainer than you are. By-the-by, would it not have been better to dress at the castle, as you must change this gown for the mysterious garments that are to astound me later on ?'

'Well, I thought of that ; but, you see, as I am not to be in the first part of the entertainment, and, as Audrey is acting, I thought I should like to see it. And—and Dick'—with a sweet shy blush—'would be there too, and I thought I should like to look nice when *first* he meets me.'

'Reasons "as plenty as blackberries,"' quotes Miss Maturin, gaily; 'but the last is *the* reason—eh? However, that is neither here nor there. "I would give no man a reason upon compulsion," if I were you. Well, it is as pretty a gown as ever I saw. That woman is a jewel. Nothing like getting one's things from a good place after all. "A good place—a good price!" cry some. "But, tut—nonsense!" cry I. "What does a penny or two matter more or less, so long as one is pleased?" Dearest heart, you are as sweet a thing as ever eye did rest upon!'

'You think *he* will like me—that is, *it*?' asks Dick's betrothed, with an anxious air and a conspicuous blush, and an elaborate gesture towards her gown.

'If he doesn't, he ought to be ashamed of himself. But even the doubt wrongs him.' Then she grows silent, and the fond appreciation of the beautiful girl before her dies from her eyes, and she seems lost in a painful reverie. 'So long ago it seems,' she says, 'and yet to-night it is so near! Just in such a gown I have seen *her*, with those very pearls around her neck! I am thinking of your mother, child—your counterpart, and all the past rises within my heart and fills me with dread.'

'With dread, auntie?'

'Ay, child! Has any one lived a lifetime to find no dread in their past? But'—hastily—'half my fears are imaginary, as they always were. Let us forget them.'

'I am like my mother, then?' asks Dolores, looking at herself once more very earnestly in the long mirror.

'Strangely like. Yet I think I never noticed the resemblance so much before. What is it'—impatiently—'that brings back to me the past to-night with such terrible vividness? I seem to hear and feel and see as though it were before me—all that should be forgotten. Is it a presentiment of evil?' Then, seeing the girl's rapt inquiring look, she checks herself by a strong effort and sinks into a chair. 'Tut! What a brain I have!' she says, with a light laugh. 'Does it ever rest, I wonder? Come, darling; the carriage will be round soon. Come to the library, and have some tea before starting.'

'In a moment, when I have taken you to pieces,' says Dolores, saucily. 'Personal remarks, I have always been told, are rude, and such remarks you have made freely about *my* appearance. Now it is your turn; get up at once, Miss

Maturin, and let me see the faults in your apparel. None ! Positively *none* ! Lallie, you are all my fancy paints you, and more.'

'There isn't a bit of paint,' protests Miss Maturin, mildly, 'not a bit. A little powder I confess to—but of paint—nothing.'

'That old lace is a thing to dream of ; and that cap is an inspiration. Cap ! the word doesn't convey the meaning of such a delicacy. I wish I could count as many years as you, that I might wear just such lace as that, and meanly ape at age in a lovely mob cap. Do you know,' says Miss Lorne, impressively, 'I'm awfully glad *you* are my auntie and no other. I should so hate to walk into a room with an old dowdy.'

'But if I were an old dowdy, you would still be—'

'That is nonsense'—briskly—'and I shouldn't ! For this reason, that if you were a dowdy, you wouldn't be my Lallie, and I *suppose*'—severely—'you don't want me to love any one as I love you and Dick.'

This extraordinary speech is so unanswerable, that Miss Maturin wisely refrains from further argument, and is recompensed for her forbearance by a loving kiss from her tyrant.

'That is the reward of merit,' says Miss Lorne, 'for looking so charming to-night. There is nobody so handsome as you, Lallie.'

'Isn't there ?' says Miss Maturin. She smiles. Then some little bitter thought, unworthy of her, rises within her heart, and comes to her lips and passes them.

'What ! not even Lady Bouverie, or Mrs. Wemyss, or any of your new friends ?' she asks. Having made this absurd little remark, she is very properly ashamed of herself, and declines to meet Dolores's eyes. But Dolores is not to be thus baffled. Placing her hands beneath her aunt's chin, she turns her face deliberately to the light and examines it with a critical and most impartial judgment.

'I do believe you are *jealous*,' she says, at last, in a tone of withering scorn, largely mingled with incredulous surprise. 'Jealous ! Yes ! It is no use your shaking your wicked head at me—jealous is the word. Don't deny it—I can see it written in every line of your expressive features. Oh, you naughty child ! What is to be done with you ? Aren't you ashamed of yourself ?'

'Well,' returns Miss Maturin, looking as confused as if she

was only Dolores's own age, and was just caught in the act of committing a punishable fault—'I have thought of late, that somehow you were fading away from me—ceasing to be my very own—growing too occupied with your neighbours to leave room in your heart (at least so big a room as of old) for me.'

'I have a great mind to put you in the corner and leave you there, and go to the castle without you.' Then she breaks into merry laughter. 'I shall let you into a secret,' she says, 'so far as one of your rivals is concerned. I—I can't bear Lady Bouverie! Whenever I see her I decide at once that life is *not* worth living. She frightens me. I am honestly afraid of her, though I don't exactly know why, but I always think I shall—some day. Whereas you, Lallie! Fancy my being afraid of you! And you know what fear does—it casts out love. No, I could not love Lady Bouverie.'

'It does not,' says Miss Maturin, with sudden promptitude. 'There you are utterly wrong! I adore you (as you unfortunately know), but I am in abject fear of you all the same. Come, come, cloak yourself, lazy one, or the duchess will think you a defaulter.'

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Brilliant lights, brilliant costumes, and music more brilliant than all the rest. The curtain has not yet ascended, and all are sitting in eager anticipation of a good laugh at the expense of their friends. This is the proper spirit in which to prepare yourself for private theatricals. There is a very orthodox curtain at the lower end of the hall, behind which an impromptu but very real stage has been erected. There is a row of foot-lights that would not have disgraced the Gaiety; 'properties' to any amount, all of the most correct, and a real live manager! If the acting is to be as perfect as the arrangements, every one feels it will be very disappointing indeed!

But of the acting (with one exception) I shall say nothing. Imagine it as you will. We have all been the sorrowful witnesses of our friends' efforts in this direction, and know by sad experience that amateurs are a wearying of the flesh. There is the 'dainty one' who trips and minces it across the stage to the discomfiture of her fellow-actors, and refuses utterly to speak in an intelligible tone lest her voice should lose its softness—who smiles impartially through her griefs and woes to show her pearly teeth, and who, if she *must* faint, does it with a careful regard for the picturesque, and an utter



disregard of the truth ! Then there is the 'self-possessed one,' who struts the stage as though it were a wine-press or a prison-cell ; and yells all her sentences, and turns her laugh into a defiant snort, and makes quite a point of dropping into a dead silence every now and then (at the most damning moments so far as the success of the play is concerned), to draw her train leisurely aside, or to open her fan with a slow and languid sweep just to show the audience how collected she is, and that it is not the first time *she* has exhibited her undoubted talent to an admiring crowd ! Alas ! nor the *last*, either !

And then there is the 'nervous one,' who, perhaps on the whole, is the most trying of all, though he or she does not create within us those murderous feelings that animate us when the others are upon the boards.

The theatricals at the castle are like all the rest, neither better nor worse, with one great, nay, startling exception. It is given to Audrey Ponsonby to positively electrify her audience by a display of histrionic talent that, with culture, might make her fortune on the stage, and is only too good for a private performance.

From first to last she is the one person who claims and holds a hushed and undivided attention. Her beauty alone—undisputed as it is—would not suffice for this ; it is the absolute force and passion of her acting that carries them all before it. She is superb, unrivalled ; there is a touch of insolence about her face that accords well with the character chosen, and lifts her far above all her compeers.

Some old play was selected, after all, in which kings and queens and all the mightiest of the earth hold chief parts, and Audrey, in her white-and-gold draperies, that seem to cling to her and make one with her slender, exquisite shape, looks like a queen indeed, with a golden crown upon her head and gold chains hanging from her gemmed girdle, and all her beautiful hair let loose to hang far below her waist in a waving, glittering mass.

There is a restless fire in her eyes and a strange pallor on her cheeks. She enacts her part—almost indeed creating it—with a *verve*, a passion, for which no one there is at all prepared. Some are subdued, some a little shocked, all are fascinated. A more utter transformation than has taken place in her could hardly be conceived. The girl, so haughty and reserved in ordinary life, has for once thrown aside all

constraint, and is in turns a fond, impassioned woman, a queen stern and offended, a being made meek by love's power, made mad by jealousy ! She holds every brain captive whilst she stands upon the mimic stage.

And now it is all over, and, glad, radiant, she passes away from the plaudits that still follow her, her bare lovely arms filled with flowers.

'To praise is almost an impertinence in this case,' says Vyner, going forward to meet her as she enters the green room. 'Yet I must speak or die. You were perfection—that rarest of all things. Let me congratulate you.'

'Was Dad looking at me ? Had he a good place ? Was he pleased ?' asks she, hurriedly, ignoring his words as though they are unheard, and speaking with an intensity of longing that betokens her desire to get affirmations to all her questions. Plainly her whole soul is in them.

'Yes ; he could see you. And he was pleased, I know. Once, when you were more than usually pathetic, I saw tears in his eyes.'

'*Dear Dad !*' says the girl, pressing her flowers to her bosom, and whispering his name very softly. 'He taught me my part,' she says, looking up at Vyner. I used to say it over and over again to him every morning. Such trouble as he took with me ! But now I hope'—smiling—'he thinks this last pupil of his has not disgraced him. Did I really get through it well ? What did—*you* think of me ?'

The excitement of her success, the warmth of the applause, is still with her. She has not yet gone back again to the old reserve. There is a distinct touch of coquetry in her beautiful eyes as she half lifts them to his and glances at him from under her long lashes.

'For years I have been trying to answer that question satisfactorily to myself without the faintest result,' replies Vyner, slowly. 'And, as for to-night, when one has fallen beneath the spell of an enchantress, where is the time for any serious reflection ? Thought was beyond me ! I could only sit still and humbly admire.'

'Never saw anything like it in all my life,' says Sir Chicksy, rushing up to the heroine of the hour with flushed cheeks and a general incoherency.

A feeble part in the play had been assigned him, so that now he has of course the run of the green-room. It was a very feeble part indeed, but such as it was it had proved too

much for Sir Chicksy. It routed him with great slaughter, and left him without the power of beating even an ignominious retreat. A servant he was supposed to be (a 'minion' I believe they called him), and all he had to do was to cross the stage from L. to R. and say,—

'My lord, the barges wait.'

But he had made quite a remarkable thing of it! When he fell over the queen's train and only recovered himself by knocking off the king's wig, people merely laughed and said it was 'quite too awfully comic,' but when he said 'My bord, the larges wait,' nobody laughed, and every one wanted to know whether it was Greek he spoke, or Hindustanee, or very old English!

'Never saw such acting,—never, I give you my word,' he is saying now, gazing at Audrey with wild enthusiasm in his eye, and a ferocious grin born of his noble determination to keep *the* eye-glass in his left orb. 'Talk of Mary Anderson, an' Ellen Terry, an' an'—the lot of 'em! Not to be named in the same day with you! You'd lick 'em all to fits! Eh, Vyner?'

'I hope not, my dear fellow. I think you wrong Miss Ponsonby. She would not, I am convinced, hurt a fly; and besides, corporal punishment would not be considered—'

He is interrupted by a young man who comes eagerly up to Miss Ponsonby. He is still in a costume belonging to some dead century, and has therefore been one of her fellow-actors. He is a good-looking young man of the 'curled darling' type—a captain in a cavalry regiment and a guest at the castle. He is, too, decidedly *épris* with Miss Ponsonby, as any one who runs may read.

'Ah! what should we have done without you!' exclaims he, fervently, gazing with undisguised admiration at the white-and-gold beauty before him. 'You *made* the play. You were magnificent. Our rehearsals gave me no idea of your power. But you must be awfully done up. Let me get you something—champagne? claret cup? And let me take away these tributes to your charms.'

He points to the flowers she still holds in her white arms.

"*Embarras de richesses*," murmurs Vyner, with a slight shrug. His words may be meant for her flowers, or her admirers, or anything. 'Let me relieve you of some of them.'

Whereupon he takes himself and the flowers away.

'Where is Mrs. Wemyss?' calls somebody, rushing franti-

cally through the room. 'Seen her anywhere, any one? She's wanted for the first tableau; they are all arranged, only waiting for her.'

'She was here with Bouverie a moment ago. Try the little ante-room beyond.'

The little ante-room beyond, being tried, yields up its treasures. Mrs. Wemyss, gliding out from it into the more brilliant room outside in a quaint but seductive costume of crimson and gold and literally hung with sequins, asks in the mildest of tones if any one is looking for *her*, and is instantly captured and carried off by the frantic young man to be posed in the coming tableau.

There are only four or five tableaux in all, put on as little bits of light and colouring, seen through a gauze mist, to finish off the play; pictures to represent in living form some already seen upon canvas, but which—more fortunate than we frail mortals—will live for ever. They are all exquisitely arranged—a celebrated R.A., a friend of her Grace, having taken them in hand—and are all exquisitely portrayed. But with one alone we have to do.

As the velvet curtains part, and Dolores, in a gilt frame, stands revealed in all her sad beauty, a thrill of delight runs through the audience. To many of them she is unknown, and to them the sweetness of her is a revelation.

But through Miss Maturin there runs a shiver of unexpressed agony. She sinks back in her seat, as though she would well escape from the vision before her, and at last a few incoherent words are forced from her.

'Oh, no,' she murmurs, indistinctly, almost unconsciously; 'they should not have given her such a part as that—no, not *that*!'

Her voice, subdued though it is, is miserable, and strikes upon Mr. Vyner's ear, who happens to be her nearest neighbour. Glancing at her, he notices how thoroughly unstrung she looks, and what an ashen pallor has overspread her face; and, with a desire for a more minute criticism, he returns his gaze to the representation before him.

Dolores as 'Adversity!' Alas, how the character suits her! It seems as though the feeling of it has sunk into her very soul, so sadly resigned she looks, so replete with gentle melancholy. Leaning against a wall, with her mournful eyes looking straight before her into a possibly happy past now gone for ever, with one soft arm upraised and a pale bunch of

flowers in the small clinging fingers, with a divine resignation upon her perfect face, she appears before them all, more sweet, more sorrowful than words can tell.

'It is horrible!' mutters Miss Maturin, through her pale lips.

'A mere bit of exceedingly pretty acting, after all,' says Vyner, cheerfully. 'Dear me! How wonderfully well she looks the part! Rather spoils the effect to think how she will be laughing over it in a minute or two—eh?'

He feels a strange tenderness towards the woman beside him as he notes her distress, and tells himself how she cannot endure even in imagination to see her darling so distressed.

'Yes, yes, no doubt!' says Miss Maturin, recovering herself with an effort. 'It is only that I cannot bear to see her look like that.'

She draws a heavy breath, and turns her head with a smile that is almost tragic to her companion. This change of position brings her glance towards the other side of the room. She lifts her eyes—

And then all at once she is unaware of Vyner's vicinity. The very walls of the room seem to fade away from her; the mists of twenty years are pushed aside; there is nothing now in reality but the earnest piercing gaze of two dark eyes.

The owner of them bows to her. Afterwards it seems impossible to her; but in truth she does return the salute. How many years have come and gone since last she and this stranger—who still is not strange—thus gazed at each other, and to what a time his presence carries her back—to what miserable hours, what moments fraught with shame! Once in that terrible past this man had lived in the old village where her home had been, where she and her sister had dwelt.

Great Heaven! how it all comes back! First the happy, quiet, quaint old days, with no disturbing element, with no griefs, if no great joys, in them—days perhaps now the bitterest of all to dwell upon; and then the break-up of the calm household; her flight into Egypt, as it were, and her fond *vain* hopes that all who knew of her or hers then, might haply be dead ere her return to England; and, lastly, the return, and with it now the discovery that, after seventeen long years of silence and growing blessed forgetfulness, one lives who is here smiling at her, *remembering* as he smiles no doubt, and ready to betray.

Oh, the cruelty of it! the bitter cruelty of it! to escape

for so long, to be at last undone ! Like the lost spirits in the shade, she has been for ever grasping after the waters of oblivion, and like them, her eager hands have failed to seize them.

And still Dolores stands there a too perfect 'Adversity,' a thing most beautiful ; but to her, Miss Maturin, positively repellant. How has the girl caught that mournful expression ? Is it only acting, or is it real—the faint growing shadow of what will one day rest upon her face for ever ? A desire to rise and cry aloud to her, to *command her* to cast from her this miserable counterfeit of a grief that yet may touch her, almost overcomes Miss Maturin.

She conquers herself, however ; but, oh, the relief of it when the curtains close and the pretty drooping figure and sad face are hidden away behind it, and she can lean back on her chair and lose herself in a semi-insensibility that yet is not strong enough to altogether kill the terrible thrilling sense of pain that runs all through it.

The other tableaux are unseen by her, although her open eyes appear to rest upon them. She is hardly awake to anything going on around her, until two soft hands are laid upon her shoulders, and Dolores, clad once more in her clinging lace gown, stoops over her with a little low happy laugh.

'So far, so good,' she says, merrily. 'Business first, you know, and pleasure afterwards. Business is at an end, and now for the other thing. Well, Lallie, and what did you think of your lovely niece to-night ?'

She laughs again saucily, and pats Miss Maturin's shoulder.

'Did I look sufficiently forlorn ?' she asks, gaily.

'It was horrible !' says Miss Maturin, huskily. 'You must never do it again, child—never ! Do you hear ?'

'Why, my success, then, has been a genuine one !' exclaims Dolores, with a bright laugh. 'I have positively impressed you.'

'You are really happy, darling ?' asks Miss Maturin, with curious irrelevance, tightening her hand convulsively upon the girl's fingers—'quite happy ? There is nothing—no thought or fear of coming evil—no——'

'Now, you *know* I warned you about the curried lobster,' says Dolores, in a tone of mournful reproach. 'It *always* makes you uncomfortable and drags you down to the very lowest depths of despair. I shall forbid cook to have it again until you can summon courage to reject it, or at least give me

your word of honour to take only *one* help and that of the most meagre description.'

'I don't think it is the lobster,' says Miss Maturin, feebly. 'But answer me,' eagerly. 'You *are* happy?'

'It is my belief,' says Dolores, severely, 'that in your present frame of mind you will be intensely disgusted if I give you "yes" for an answer! And so to punish you for your degrading passion for sea monsters I shall say it. *Yes*. There! already I can see the grey shade of disappointment creeping over your ingenuous countenance. Really though, Lallie,' turning her little hand, palm upwards, within Miss Maturin's and giving hers a loving squeeze, 'I never felt so sure of being happy as I do to-night. The very sweetest luck will attend me—all good sprites are near me; I feel it—I *know* it!'

She turns a radiant glance upon her aunt, and a laugh of pure youth and enjoyment issues from her lips.

'Ah, Mr. Vyner,' she cries, catching sight of him—'you again! When is the dancing to commence?'

'Almost directly. They are giving a few minutes to Lady Gertrude to change her dress; she was in the last tableau. How d'ye do, Mrs. Drummond? Charming affair all through, wasn't it?'

'I am not a judge, perhaps,' says Mrs. Drummond, solemnly, who, with her friend and rather doubtful ally Mrs. Dovedale, has drawn close to where he is standing; 'but to my eyes the—the exhibition of to-night was extremely painful.'

'You forgot your glasses?' asks Vyner, a little uncertainly perhaps, but with unquestionable politeness and the gentlest regret.

'It was no question of glasses,' says Mrs. Drummond, reddening rather furiously. 'I can see perfectly, Mr. Vyner, without the aid of art—a fact I never had reason to deplore until to-night.'

'You mean to tell me that something occurred sufficiently distressing to make you wish yourself blind?'

'Perhaps that is putting it a little strongly,' objects Mrs. Drummond; 'but this much I can say, that, when I find myself forced to witness the forward conduct of—of people with whom I am on speaking terms, and of whom I would wish to have a better opinion, I confess it both shocks and grieves me.'

'*People!*' echoes Mr. Vyner, anxiously. 'How many of them? Have the whole lot of us sunk in your esteem? Must

I too consider myself undone? "Forward," did you say? Oh I *hope* I wasn't "forward!"

'When the word "people" escaped me, I spoke unadvisedly,' corrects Mrs. Drummond, still on the solemn tack; 'though it was through a kindly desire to shield one whom we all know that I used it. But sometimes kindness is mistaken. Had I given utterance to the word "person," I should have been nearer my real meaning.'

'Oh, yes, much nearer!' murmurs Mrs. Dovedale, sweetly.

'Bless me, this is terrible!' exclaims Vyner. 'I had no idea Lady Gertrude had so offended against good taste as to convey to her audience the impression of being bold and forward! "Forward?" Yes; that was the word, I think. I am sure, Mrs. Drummond, were the duchess to hear you disapproved of her daughter's conduct, she would be——'

'Grossly offended—with Lady Gertrude,' puts in Mrs. Dovedale, mildly, from behind her fan.

'Oh, pray hush!' entreats Mrs. Drummond, looking fearfully around her—Mr. Vyner's tone has been in no wise subdued. 'How could you imagine I was alluding to dear Lady Gertrude, who is in all respects what a gentlewoman should be? No; I was speaking of Miss Ponsonby. Her dress, her unmaidenly attitudes, her evident and very distressing craving for admiration, her boldness and effrontery, all pained me to the last degree!'

'We could all see that,' murmurs her friend, in her soft, childish treble. 'We all noticed your open distress and your brave efforts to conceal it—efforts so great as to make you look at times *almost* out of temper. You see how one suffers for one's good actions! But then, fortunately, we all *know* you,' says Mrs. Dovedale, with a sweet little caressing smile, 'and *exactly* how you felt.'

'How grieved Miss Ponsonby would be were she to hear this!' exclaims Vyner, pathetically. 'Your opinion, Mrs. Drummond, weighs with her so much that an adverse word from you would, I think, cause her to feel despair!'

The concern upon his face is deep and earnest, yet Mrs. Dovedale's infantile glance, turning quickly upon him, grows sharp.

'I am sure you agree with all I have said,' goes on Mrs. Drummond, heavily, 'you, who so well know what a true lady should be,' here she casts a speaking glance at a distant corner,



where stands the florid and somewhat under-dressed Georgina, 'cannot fail to understand my sentiments.'

'I do indeed fully understand them,' says Vyner, sympathetically.

'And then that undisguised flirtation with Captain Greville!' continues Mrs. Drummond, warming to her work, and turning up her eyes to the ceiling with quite a lamentable display of pious grief. Now or never, she decides hurriedly, is the time given her to put an end for ever to Audrey's interference with her plan of making Georgina Mrs. Vyner. Now or never! She braces herself afresh. 'Ah, how immodest, how self-confident was that wretched girl's conduct all this evening! I am sure I most sincerely pity poor Lady Bouverie!'

'Anything wrong with her?' asks Vyner, changing his glass from one eye to the other, and regarding Mrs. Drummond with what seems to her like growing anxiety.

'*Everything*, when she is compelled to own that girl as her niece. There is nothing in such bad taste as a flirtation carried on before the eyes of the world.'

'You would recommend one, then, carried on behind its back? Oh, fie, Mrs. Drummond,' exclaims Vyner, lightly, 'such sentiments from you! Does Miss Drummond share them?'

'You at least, I think, understand my sweet girl,' says 'the sweet girl's' mother, with gentle reproach. 'She indeed possesses a soul that lifts her far above all such sad frivolities. To trifle with a human heart is out of her power.'

'Oh, quite!' acquiesces little Mrs. Dovedale, with enthusiasm. 'To enslave a man, to keep him chained to her side for an entire evening, as others can, is a thing she *could not do!*'

'And so you think Miss Ponsonby is trying to break young Greville's heart?' asks Vyner laughing.

'I have no doubt she is trying to entrap the infatuated young man into a marriage,' returns Mrs. Drummond, spitefully. 'He is heir to a baronetcy, and is an excellent *parti* in every way. Her open encouragement is shameful!'

'They have been together a good deal, certainly,' hesitates Mrs. Dovedale, mildly; 'but I was standing near them for a long time, and their conversation was entirely about the play and the costumes.'

'That is really nothing,' says Vyner, with a genial smile. 'I once knew a fellow who was talking to a girl about aspara-

gus, when suddenly he turned and proposed to her. So, you see, you never can tell.'

'Well, to me it is a most melancholy spectacle to see a young woman evince such an ardent desire for adulation,' sighs Mrs. Drummond, with marked Christianity. She looks quite sorry for the benighted object of her remarks. Thus she lays a thin coating of religious veneer over the raging vindictiveness beneath. 'Now, Georgina is so different,' she says.

'True, true,' agrees Vyner, eagerly, with a tender glance at the distant fair one. 'I could hardly imagine any two people so utterly dissimilar.'

Again Mrs. Dovedale looks at him.

'Yes, I have many things for which to be grateful,' says Mrs. Drummond, meekly. 'My Georgina is so gentle, so retiring; she claims nothing; she does not put herself forward in any way. Her very dearest desires she leaves for *time* to grant.'

'She does indeed leave much to be desired,' says Vyner, with a smile so affectionate, so almost filial, as to allay the suspicions that this extraordinary speech has very naturally aroused in the breast of Mrs. Drummond.

But Mrs. Dovedale's innocent lips widen, and her eyes light up marvellously.

'What a funny little speech!' she says, artlessly; and she makes a mental note of the 'funny speech,' to be retailed again by-and-by to her friend with kindly comments thereupon.

'I am so glad, dear Mr. Vyner, to find you agree with me in my estimate of Miss Ponsonby,' says Mrs. Drummond, pleasantly. 'A fast girl is my abhorrence.'

'Ah, here comes your abhorrence,' exclaims Vyner, cheerfully, as Audrey, a lovely creature in her white-and-gold draperies, sweeps slowly up to them.

Mrs. Drummond starts perceptibly; her colour changes, and she tries with a violent effort to bring the ghastly semblance of a smile to her lips. After all, this objectionable girl is Lady Bouverie's niece, and it will not do to offend her hopelessly. She smiles therefore, and puts out her hand, which Audrey manages not to see, acknowledging her presence only by a bow as coldly graceful as it is disdainful.

Mrs. Drummond, discouraged, falls back a little; but Mrs. Dovedale, who is all smiles and pretty glances, presses forward.

'I cannot tell you how you have charmed us all, Miss Pon-

sonby,' she says, airily; 'Mrs. Drummond especially. You really should have prepared us for such perfect work; you and Captain—Captain—ah, what is it?—I mean your lover, your'—with childish confusion—'your *stage* lover, of course—were infinitely superior to all the rest of the actors. How stupid I am about remembering names!'—with a smile replete with covert insolence—'it takes me quite a long, long time to learn them.'

'It takes some people a long, long time to learn anything,' replies Audrey, with a pale smile equally insolent; 'even *common manners*.'

She half lifts her drowsy lids, and regards the vicar's wife as one might a person of very inferior quality indeed. Mrs. Dovedale quails beneath that glance, and, with an affectation of seeking somebody, fades slowly away.

Then Audrey turns to Vyner.

'And so you spend your time,' she says, with a contemptuous shrug of her white shoulders, 'with such people as those! You find them amusing?'

'Intensely so! Mrs. Drummond more especially.'

'One would, of course,' says Audrey, curling her lip. 'Was she giving you a list of Georgina's virtues?'

'Not all the time.'

'Then she was giving you a list of my vices?'

'They tell one it is rash to contradict a woman twice,' replies Vyner, calmly.

'Which means I guessed correctly. And you listened to her? You found such talk amusing?'

'Good, honest vituperation is interesting at all times; and, to do Georgina's mother justice, she *can* "give the bastinado. with her tongue." Is that Mrs. Wemyss over there? What a charming laugh she has! Shall we join her?'

'As you will'—indifferently; then her whole face changes. 'Ah, you, Captain Greville?' she says, smiling, and flushing faintly as she turns to Greville, who has just come up to her with a programme in his hand.

'For you,' he says, giving it to her. 'And now for your trusty messenger's reward—the first waltz?'

She smiles an acquiescence.

'And the second—and——'

'Don't be greedy,' interposes she, softly. 'Let us put a full stop after the second—for the present at least. I am going now to speak to Mrs. Wemyss.'

'Why, so I think am I,' says Greville, laughing and accompanying her and Vyner, as they cross the room, to where Mrs. Wemyss, Bruno Bouverie, and a rather disconsolate Sir Chicksy are standing.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

Cold eyelids that hide like a jewel  
Hard eyes that grow soft for an hour.

Memory grey with many a flowerless year.

SWINBURNE.

'WHAT a day we're 'aving,' says Bruno, as they come up. 'Audrey, my congratulations; though poor, they are sincere; but every one makes allowance for my intellectual defects.'

'Mrs. Drummond was delighted with you,' laughs Mrs. Wemyss, mischievously, giving Audrey's hand a surreptitious squeeze. Perhaps she is the one woman in the world whom Audrey's cold manner has never repelled. 'Oh, the joy in the dear old lady's eye when your success was assured, and when the Duke flung you that outrageous bouquet! Her smile was a perfect sunbeam!'

'So warm that it withered all around?' says Vyner.

'By-the-bye, has any one seen the fair Georgina?' asks Bruno.

'I did. I caught a passing glimpse of her; but I was afraid to look again,' says Vyner, regretfully; 'she had only as much clothing on as the law compels, and I am very shy!'

'She was with Bob Haverly,' puts in Sir Chicksy, in a moody tone. He was in a very low state indeed before Audrey arrived with Captain Greville; but now he looks murderous.

'In default of a better,' says Bruno. 'Poor "staggering Bob!" I hope he was sober.'

'I hope he wasn't,' says Vyner. 'If slightly indistinct in views and manners, he would not so entirely realise the misery of the situation.'

'Ah, true! After all, you are a better friend to him than I am. A discreet intoxication might help him through. A small matter, and really no trouble to *him*.'

'Little things make up the sum of life,' says Mrs. Wemyss,

solemnly, upon which they all laugh. 'There will be a flower, a kiss, a vacant seat, a temporary aberration like our poor Bob's; and there is no knowing what will come of it all.'

'There is no knowing what will come of anything,' groans Sir Chicksy from out the utmost gloom. This remarkable speech is so obscure as to call for no answer from any man.

'What is the matter with him?' asks Mrs. Wemyss, in a low voice, turning to Vyner. 'He has been in quite a desperate state for the last hour. Was there ever so miserable a creature? It isn't toothache, or earache, or neuralgia, because I suggested them all and got three "Noes" for answer, and not another syllable thrown in even for friendship's sake. What *can* it be?'

'It is Greville; "the forward youth that *would* appear." And what is friendship beside jealousy? A paltry shadow! Poor Sir Chicksy! If he has pinned his faith to Miss Ponsonby, I doubt there is trouble before him. However, "sorrow may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning!" that is a fair division, is it not? And, after all, one can't be always on the grin—at least, most of us can't. Few'—with a smile—'are as triumphant over their jars and frets as Bruno.'

'"He hath, indeed, a merry note,"' quotes Mrs. Wemyss, smiling. It is a pleasant smile, warmed by a delicate blush.

'Ah, there go the fiddles!' exclaims Greville, turning eagerly to Audrey.

'Then there goes my last chance of happiness,' says Vyner. 'Now to approach my partner with the smiling face that hides the breaking heart. I've been trying not to see her for the last ten minutes; but I experienced a considerable difficulty in the effort since I discovered her whereabouts.'

'Where is she?'

'Glaring at me from the opposite wall. See her? Big bony girl in the gridelin gown.'

'What on earth did you do it for?' asks Bruno, in open amazement.

'Let in for it, of course. But I shan't forget my debt to her chaperon. Yet, after all, it might be worse; it might be Georgina.'

'Miss Ponsonby,' says Sir Chicksy, coming awkwardly to the front, 'may I have the pleasure of this?'

'I am engaged for it, unfortunately.'

'The next, then?'

'Is not a waltz. And I never dance anything else.'

'The next waltz, then?'—desperately.

'Is promised also.'

'Ah!' says poor Sir Chicksy, falling back discouraged, and casting a withering glance at the successful Greville.

Perhaps Audrey feels for him; perhaps it is that she finds it impossible, like most women, to loosen her hold on a slave. At all events, she leans a little towards him, and beckons him once more to her side with a slight wave of her fan.

'Would the third be of any use to you?' she asks, coldly, but with one of her rare smiles. 'Yes? Then take it. By-the-bye'—with a sudden determination to strengthen his chains or else to show off her power to the others—'how is it that you, of all my acquaintances, have been the only one to give me no pretty compliment to-night?'

'I don't suppose anything I could say would be pretty,' sighs Sir Chicksy, despondently.

'Try,' says Vyner, the finest encouragement in his tone.

'I *have* tried'—gloomily—'and I might as well have let it alone. She forgets all about it. It's only natural she should, you know; I'm not one to be remembered. But, as it happens, I was one of the very first to congratulate her when she came off the stage.'

'Ah, so you were!' acknowledges Audrey, lightly. 'I forget now what it was you said; but I know you were very kind.'

'Kind!' repeats the infatuated youth, with bitterest self-disdain. 'Who am I that I should presume to be *kind* to you? I'm glad you have forgotten all about it. "My words that would praise thee are impotent things."'

'Good gracious, Chaucer! Recollect yourself!' exclaims Bruno, giving him a warning nudge and a shocked glance. 'However badly you may *feel*, learn to restrain yourself; and, at all events, never give way to bad language in public.'

'Eh?' says Sir Chicksy, in a stupefied tone.

'To say "*impudent* things" to Miss Ponsonby! My dear fellow, what madness! I really can't see my way clear to the end of this sad affair.'

'I didn't say that,' exclaims Sir Chicksy, with wild wrath, growing more and more desperate as he sees his idol disappear in the distance with the more favoured Greville. 'Nothing of the sort! The word I used was "*impotent*"!'

'*Very* impudent,' persists Bouverie, gravely. 'As Miss

Ponsonby's near relative, I must ask you to withdraw it—to apologise—to——'

'Oh, go it!' cries Sir Chicksy, hysterically. 'I'm not bad enough as it is, I suppose, that you must try to madden me! But I'll have satisfaction from somebody; I'll have it out of one of you for this! I'll have my revenge, or——'

Here his knee-joints coming in contact with the sharp edge of an ottoman, he perforce gives way and sinks upon it.

'A seat,' says Bruno, finishing his sentence for him. 'Well, it is the better thing of the two. Though how you presume to talk of vengeance is——'

'Bruno, be silent,' interposes Mrs. Wemyss, in a low tone, but with authority. 'You are really too bad. Let the poor boy alone. Between you all you will drive him out of his mind.'

'His *what*?' asks Vyner, mildly.

'Have you forgotten, Mr. Vyner,' says Mrs. Wemyss, severely, 'that your gaunt partner is awaiting you?'

'No; I was remembering it all the time,' returns Mr. Vyner, sweetly. 'I am helping her to a perfect frame of mind. To possess one's soul in patience is a rare merit. I think, however, she has now possessed it long enough in that state, and I fly to her.'

'For me,' says Bruno, 'am I to understand that you forbid me speech? Am I to hear my own cousin cruelly insulted, and take no steps to punish the offender?'

'You are to cease teasing that boy.'

'Very good; I shan't play any more,' says Bruno, rising with an injured front. 'And, for the future, Mrs. Wemyss, you will be kind enough to remember that we are not upon speaking terms.'

'Oh, that I might dare to hope it!' exclaims she, laughing and turning to seat herself beside the disconsolate baronet.

'Why so pale and wan, fond lover?' murmurs she, archly. 'Anything the matter that I may hear?'

'Matter!' cries the poor fool, something that is *almost* an expression coming into his face. 'Everything's the matter! It is all up with me and—and her! I don't mind about anything else; that ass Bouverie doesn't count with me. He is an ass, isn't he?'

'The greatest I know,' says Mrs. Wemyss, with satisfactory emphasis, and in a tone mischievously distinct, Bouverie being within hearing distance, and of course listening to every word

that may chance to fall from his 'ladye's' lips, as a true lover should.

'But, oh, Mrs. Wemyss, how I love that peerless creature !' goes on Sir Chicksy, tearfully. 'And I'm nothin' to her—nothin' ! Ah, there lies the sting ! I'm less than the dust beneath her feet ! I wish,' cries Sir Chicksy, with a sudden burst of tragical sorrow, 'that I *was* the dust beneath her feet ! Anyhow, I could touch her then ! I could cling to her shoe ; an'—an' she'd have to carry me along with her wherever she went !'

There is a suspiciously smothered sound somewhere near ; but when Mrs. Wemyss glances in its direction, Mr. Bouverie is to be seen plainly wrapped in happy thoughts of his own, and is bowing and smiling in a most affable manner to somebody in the far end of the room. It is a crowded end, and of course it would be impossible to single out the fortunate object of his attentions.

'Mr. Bouverie,' says Mrs. Wemyss, with ominous mildness, 'to-night's theatricals seem to have got into your head. When you have ceased to enact the part of a nodding mandarin to a purely imaginary audience, I shall be glad if you will take me to the next room.'

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Two hours are as nothing when one is young and engaged for every dance before the fiddlers have well got through their first dismal tuning. To Audrey, still flushed with her great triumph, they are as bare moments that fly by her, fraught with a gay intoxication.

She has laughed with a gaiety, a freedom from constraint strange to her. Born with a spirit unsuited to poverty, she has drifted year by year into a state of feeling, false and embittered, that has rendered most people distasteful, or, at the best, objects of suspicion in her eyes. Only her 'Dad,' her best-loved, is entirely without fault within her sight. To-night, however, the unwonted excitement of an ensured success has lifted her above her lower nature. Her enjoyment of the passing hour is not forced ; she enters into the spirit of it with an eagerness that would have surprised even herself, had she spared time to think of it, and that delighted her 'Dad,' who, dragged from his seclusion and his book to witness her triumph, has been more than rewarded by the smiles and blushes he has seen mantling upon her beautiful face.

She has perhaps danced rather more than is correct with



Captain Greville, and has let the world see in a somewhat reckless manner how abject is his submission.

'My dance, I think,' says Vyner, going up to her a little before supper.

'Is it?' She has been smiling prettily at Captain Greville the moment before; but, as she answers Vyner, her smile fades, and the old, tired, listless, discontented expression returns to her. 'Let us not dance it, then. Is there no place where one can sit it out?'

'More than I need recount,' replies Vyner, with a slight shrug. 'Let me make you wise as to one of them.'

'And so you have at last known happiness?' he says to her presently, when they are seated in a little flowered recess sweet with the perfume of dying daphnes. A coloured lamp, faintly lit, sheds a pale crimson glow above their heads.

'It has been a better evening than most,' returns she, indifferently.

'Until now, you would say,' retorts he, with a short laugh. 'Well, endure me for a while, if you can, if only for the sake of appearances.'

'Appearances!'—she colours haughtily, and turns her gaze full upon him.

'You see,' says Vyner, shaking from the gold of her gown a little crawling spider that has dropped from the leaves above her, and taking no notice of her question, 'if admiration and conquest be happiness, you have gained it to-night.'

'I am no happier than I was yesterday,' returns she, coldly. 'But you spoke of appearances just now. What was it you wished me to understand?'

'That it is not altogether well to dance for an entire evening with one man.'

'You are as careful of my reputation as Lady Bouverie,' says she, with a low scornful laugh. Then she shuts her fan suddenly with a sharp angry click, and throws it on the cushion beside her. 'Did you notice her face when every one else was congratulating me?' she asks. 'It was a picture! It told its own story. What malicious eyes she has! I wish she were not my father's sister, that I might dare to offer her insolence before which hers to me would sink into insignificance!'

She draws her breath quickly, and her lips part. There are, he thinks, tears in her dusky eyes; but her lashes fall and rise so swiftly that it is difficult to be sure.

'You exaggerate her feeling towards you.'

'Her hatred, you would say. Is it not a strange thing that mere poverty should breed dislike? She cannot forgive Dad in that he was born without that lucky silver spoon. A man who must take in pupils to help him to eke out his daily bread is a distressing acquaintance at all times, and to feel that man is her brother is gall and wormwood to her.'

Her charming voice has grown impetuous, and is tinged with even a deeper shade of mockery than is usual to it.

'What a thing is poverty!' she says.

'A conquerable thing, however. You are now, I should say, in a fair way to escape its thralldom. Greville very properly has fallen in love with you.'

'Has he?'

'Hasn't he? He seemed to me as miserable a while since as any woman could possibly desire.'

'You must have been studying him very closely.'

There was no occasion for that. He wears his chains with a most engaging openness. I am so old a friend of yours that I suppose I may make myself disagreeable, and ask you any question I please? Tell me then—you mean to marry him?'

She hesitates. Her colour fades altogether, and she grows a little pale beneath his gaze.

'I may,' she says, at last.

'You *may*? Surely you have given him cause to think you *will*!'

'Oh, I know what all that means!' exclaims she, impatiently, giving him an angry half-glance. 'Are a few kind words and a smile or two equivalent to an acceptance of the handkerchief whenever my lord, after due deliberation, may choose to throw it? It is all too absurd. One is called a coquette if one smiles, and then declines to accept a man; one is sneered at if one smiles, and the man fails to come to one's feet. I am tired of the whole theory.'

'There has not been much "due deliberation" on the part of Greville.'

'How can you tell that?'

She glances at him keenly for a moment from under her long lashes.

'I have already told you that I think him the most ingenuous youth I know. He wears his heart upon his sleeve.'

'For me to peck at?'—with a low, unmirthful laugh. 'Am I then a bird of prey? It is well to know how I stand with

you. And so I owe this Captain Greville some return, you think ?'

'I am sure he counts upon your acceptance.'

'That may be so, indeed. It would be too much to expect of any man that he should believe a woman could reject him !'

She leans back in her seat, and lets her lids droop until her eyes are altogether hidden ; a little carelessly-suppressed smile, full of pretty malice, curves her faultless lips.

'You are bitter,' says Vyner, slowly.

He has not once removed his gaze from her mocking, down-cast face, so fair, so cold, so full of clashing possibilities.

'I am as Nature made me,' returns she.

'Nature should be congratulated ; you are indeed a masterpiece.

There is no one beside thee and no one above thee ;  
Thou standest alone as the nightingale sings.'

Miss Ponsonby, lifting her white lids with slow grace, gazes at him in astonishment half feigned, wholly scornful.

'You *do* know how to utilise your time,' she says. 'But to rehearse to *me* ! I think it only fair you should reveal the name of the happy being for whom all this rhapsody is really meant.'

'"Some other time, some other day,"' quotes Vyner, carelessly. 'My *affaires* are too intricate to be discussed all in one moment. Let us return to Greville. A marriage with him would please your aunt. You complain of her coldness : this might propitiate her.'

'Pah !' she says. 'What a stranger I am to you in reality, in spite of the years that bind us. Of all in this world, I am the very last who would seek to propitiate Lady Bouverie. Be assured I shall not marry to please *her*.'

'Whom then ?'—bending rather eagerly towards her, "Dad" ?'

'No'—coldly—'myself ! In doing that I shall please Dad too. You at least understand him sufficiently to know I speak the truth when I say that. But, as to pleasing Lady Bouverie, I owe her too many little elegant insults to be on her side.'

'Does she owe you nothing ?'

'Really I don't care whether she does or not,' says Audrey, with rather undue warmth. 'Take her part as much as ever you like ; I expect nothing better of you. I dare say she is

the most estimable of her sex, and that it is my lamentable want of taste that makes me think otherwise.'

'I don't take her part,' returns Vyner, losing his self-control so far as to let an angry gleam come into his eyes. 'I take no one's part, for that matter.'

'You are right. There is nothing so safe as neutrality. True wisdom consists in looking carefully after the interests of number one. I am truly wise.'

'I hope so ; but you must pardon me'—curtly—'if I confess I don't think so. If you considered Lady Bouverie's relationship to you a little more than you do, it might, I think, be of some use to you.' There is silence for a very short minute ; and then—

'It is such a pity,' says Miss Ponsonby, slowly, 'that you cannot cure yourself of that shocking habit you have of lecturing me. If, in all the years we have known each other, you could even *once* congratulate yourself on the certainty that you had done me any good by your preaching, I would say by all means continue it, objectionable though it be ; but—can you ?'

'No ; therefore I must beg your pardon,' says Vyner, with ill-suppressed mortification, 'whilst feeling that my presumption precludes the possibility of your granting it.' Then, in a moment, he recovers himself, and, throwing himself back against the cushions, laughs a little. 'I deserved it, didn't I,' he exclaims, lightly, 'to rush upon my fate like that ? But how little mercy there is in you ! Do you know, I dread a woman without a heart ?'

'So do I'—with a little shrug ; 'that is why I take such care of mine ; I can tell you I wouldn't be without it for the world, though you are always advising me to dispose of it to Sir Chicksy or Captain Greville—or—indeed, it doesn't seem to matter to you whom.'

'You mistake,' says Vyner, coolly ; 'when I did so far presume as to offer you advice, I alluded to your hand, not your heart. For my own part, in spite of your words just now, I do not believe you have a heart at all.'

'Have you ?' asks she quickly, turning to him. There is an angry defiance in her eyes.

'No'—with an indifferent smile—'it is gone from me—lost—never to be regained !'

Silence follows upon his words. They seem to have established even a greater coldness, a deeper chill in the con-

versation, than existed before. A certain sternness has come into Vyner's face that, as a rule, is foreign to it. When the stillness has become insupportable, Audrey by an effort breaks it.

'Your advocacy of my aunt was unfortunate,' she says, quietly. 'Let us never discuss her again. She jars upon me. Her conduct towards me is that of an enemy. She keeps her eye upon my lightest action.'

'Why should your actions be light?' asks he, slowly.

When his words are beyond recall, he would gladly have had them back again; but it is then too late. Her very lips grow white as she turns her face with a startled passion to his. For one second she looks as if she could *kill* him as he sits there apparently so calm, so indifferent; then an anguished sound breaks from her, a sigh that grows into a hushed sob of concentrated anger.

'*You mean?*' she asks, in a choked voice, her slender fingers tightening convulsively upon a fold of her white gown.

It is too late for retreat or apology.

'I mean that I saw you in the conservatory half an hour ago,' says Vyner, his face now nearly as white as hers.

'You are a spy!' returns she, in a low strange voice.

'I am not!' returns he, with a quick flush and a touch of dignity. 'It was the merest chance—the greatest misfortune—and I was there for a moment only! But—he was kissing your hands—he was on his knees—I shall *never* forget his face! And yet now you tell me—you give me to understand at least—that you mean nothing! What am I to think? But perhaps you only lied to me as women will, and you *do* care for him!'

He lays his hand roughly upon hers. Every vestige of colour is now gone from his face. He has evidently felt that *bêtise* of his more than he knows.

'I did not lie!' returns she, in a low tone. She draws her hand from his, and turns her face away.

'I am sorry I said—*that*,' says Vyner, presently. He is looking moodily upon the ground.

'About my actions? It is nothing.' A rather wan little smile curves her lips. 'I am accustomed to hard speeches; and, after all, "sound is only broken air"—so think no more of it.'

'I shall never cease to think of it until I am sure I have obtained your forgiveness.

'Be sure of it, then. Let us say you but jested. "Life is a jest, and all things show it."' She laughs in a tuneless way

that is very mournful, and moves her head from side to side with a fretful, weary gesture. 'Shall we return to the ball-room?'

She half rises as she speaks; but he detains her.

'I wonder how you regard me?' he says, earnestly, his hand upon her arm—'as a friend—an enemy?'

'An enemy? No. That would be too great an exertion. And, besides'—quickly—'I do you the justice to know that you are one who would not wilfully or of a set purpose injure any one.'

'As a friend, then?'

'Oh, no!'—with a little bitter smile—'not *that*! You do not love me—you *could* not hate me—sometimes I am an amusement to you; but always you are as indifferent to me as—I am to you.'

'In one particular you wrong me,' says Vyner, dropping her arm. 'I could find it the easiest thing in the world to hate you—at times.'

She laughs, and turns towards the door that leads into the room beyond. The sweet subtle sound of the distant music comes to them through the scented air, soaring, dying, thrilling as it passes them, to fade away among the leaves beyond. No human voice is near to mar its harmony or kill the sad charm of it. The melancholy drip, drip of a small fountain blends with it, rising and falling with it in gentlest sympathy, with a little plaintive sobbing, sad, but pleasant to the ear. They two are as much alone as though leagues, not paces, separate them from a laughing, glittering crowd—and even more apart in soul than in body are they from one another, so strangely do their spirits jar, so wide is the gulf that yawns between her heart and his.

'You are rested?' he says, following her.

'And refreshed. You cannot think what good you have done me,' returns she, glancing at him with a mocking light in her beautiful eyes. 'To sit a while and listen in tranquil silence to the voice of friendship is——'

'A truce to all that!' interrupts Vyner, with an impatient wave of his hand. Then he comes closer to her. 'And so you really don't mean to marry Greville?' he asks, calmly.

'No'—carelessly. 'That affecting scene you witnessed in the conservatory a while ago meant my refusal.'

She stoops to give her train a little careful set, and then moves forward into the more brilliant ante-chamber outside.

Having gained the ball-room and an anxiously expectant partner, she turns and dismisses Vyner with a little polished inclination of her haughty head.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

Now, ballad, gather poppies in thine hands,  
And sheaves of brier and many rusted sheaves  
Rain-rotten in rank lands,  
Waste marigolds and late unhappy leaves,  
And grass that fades ere any of it be mown.

SWINBURNE.

THE night is waning ; the stars are growing faint ; the sweet, sweet summer dawn is near at hand. In the perfumed darkness of the garden the lanterns are dying out one by one. Already the flower-laden breezes of early morn are waking, midst the slumbering leaves, and, though as yet 'the stars make gold of all the air,' a whisper of the coming birth of blessed day quivers through garden and yew-bound alley.

'What a scene !' murmurs Dolores, in a low, happy voice. 'See those great luminous stars up there. How they gleam ! What a tremulous beauty is theirs ! Oh, how I *love* the night !'

She stretches out her arms in childish admiration to the gentle darkness ; with all the chastened rapture of a pure spirit, she seems to drink in the exquisite loveliness around her.

'Naughty child !' says her lover, tenderly. 'How often have you read that darkness must not be preferred to light !'

They are standing alone in the quiet garden, with only the drowsy flowers for company and the sanctity of the near dawn full upon them. As he speaks, he possesses himself of her pretty extended arms, and, by a little beseeching movement, induces her to lay them round his neck.

'I will have you love nothing but me,' he says, with fond, foolish jealousy.

'"A wilful man will have his way,"' quotes she, prettily.

'Is that so ? Shall I have mine ? I shan't mind being called wilful if such an end be gained.'

He presses one little delicate pink palm to his lips, and then,—

'You have been happy to-night?' he asks, more with sure hope in his tone than anxiety.

'Too happy,' says Dolores, with a bright flush. 'A little while since, some thought flashed across me, and I felt afraid of it all. Why should the world give me only good, and to others so much misery? What am I, that I should be so blessed above my fellows? See'—running her slender fingers with a loving, lingering touch through his hair—'let me recount my riches. I have you—you! *That*'—with a little quickening of her breath and a lifting of her charming face to his—'means *everything* ; but, besides, how many other joys are mine!'

To this sweet speech he makes her no reply ; but he lays his lips upon her bonny head and draws her the eighteenth particle of an inch closer to him. It was the last remnant of space that lay between them.

'All this,' says Dolores, with a comprehensive wave of her hand to the moonlit scenery around, 'reminds me of some other night when we were abroad—auntie and I. But it was not so nice a night as this'—rubbing her cheek softly against his—'because you were not in it.'

'I hate those other nights,' says Dick.

'Oh, no, you mustn't. They were delicious in their own way. I owe them nothing but the very sweetest memories.'

'Tell me,' says Dick—'if I wasn't with you, there—there wasn't any other fellow, was there?'

'Oh, yes, very often!'—with a merry laugh. 'What? Would you have had me live upon a desert island, or spring into life full-grown, say yesterday? We knew many people. There was a little prince auntie specially affected, and he came with us everywhere ; but there was no one, there *is* no one in all the world, like you.'

'I wonder you didn't want to be a princess,' says he moodily.

'I wonder I didn't?' retorts she, mischievously. 'What a pity the idea never entered my head until now, when you put it there. Poor little prince ; perhaps he is still unmarried and pining for me!'

'Dolores, don't talk to me like that,' says Bouverie, giving her an angry little shake that wouldn't have disturbed the repose of a fly.

'Then don't you talk to *me* like that. One would imagine



you really believed it would be a finer thing for a woman to be a princess than *your* wife !’

‘True. How absurdly silly of me !’ exclaims Bouverie, with a laugh. ‘My excessive modesty is a positive affectation. Oh, love, *love*, to think you will really be my wife some day ! It sounds too good to be true. There !—never mind me ; I’ll say it is *not* too good if you wish—and that it *shall* be true.’

‘Hush !’ whispers she, with a sudden vague tremor in her voice. ‘Do not be so entirely sure. How can we tell, how can we know, what lies before us ? It is unlucky to speak with such a boastful certainty.’

She shivers a little, and clings to him.

‘I *am* sure,’ persists he, boldly, ‘nothing, unless it be death, can come between us. And why think of death on such a night as this ? Think, instead, of the happy life that lies before us. It shall be as beautiful, as tranquil, as this scene on which we gaze. Look up and think of the eternal stars above us, and remember that our love is eternal even as they. Now what shall part us ?’

He laughs aloud, and kisses her with a triumphant fervour. And she smiles back at him and returns his caress, and forgets the shadow that for years has followed on her path.

‘Now tell me of those “other nights,”’ he says, gaily. ‘I defy them—I no longer grudge them to you. Go on.’

‘The telling would carry us into another week. And just now only a flitting vision of them is with me. Again I seem to be creeping along in a gaudy gondola beneath a moon that — Pouf ! Even that sweet thing over there’—cries she, pointing to the far horizon where Diana, pale and spent, is preparing to lay down her bow—‘is but as “water unto wine” compared with it !’

‘When you talk to me of your former life,’ says Bouverie, holding her somewhat back from him that he may the better look into those mystic eyes of hers that never cease to hold their charm for him, ‘it makes me marvel to think so frail a creature could have travelled so much and so far.’

‘It was a strange fancy of auntie’s to keep me from my native land until I was quite grown up. Perhaps she thought with some people that travelling gives the most liberal education of all ?’

‘I dare say. And she is right, I think.’

‘She is always right—yes. And, indeed, I loved our wanderings. The skating in Vienna ; the Alpine climbing—

oh, how auntie hated that!—the Venice sunsets; and the pretty cooing pigeons in the Piazza of St. Mark. I used to feed them every day, and they, do you know, they came to know me quite, and would strut after me tail downwards whenever I appeared. Ah, the yellow sunshine and the wonderful grey shadows, they all return to me; they do not permit me to forget. To me Italy is a very *dream*! Dick'—laying her hand beneath his chin—'will you take me there when we are married? Your—*our* England is of course the dearest place to me; but yet I do want to see my Italy again.'

'When shall we start?' asks Bouverie, with eager animation.

'For the house?' asks she, demurely. 'Indeed, you remind me, Mr. Bouverie, that we have already overstayed our time, and that our absence will cause comment. Come, then.'

"'At a touch sweet pleasure melteth,'" quotes Dick, ruefully. 'I had forgotten there was a world in-doors. What a pity to leave this glorious light for the more glaring one within! Don't let us go in yet.'

'I am afraid we must.'

'Are you in haste to leave me?' asks he, with foolish reproach in his tone.

But how could he be the true lover he is were he not the victim of fond folly? 'Tis impossible to love and be wise.'

'Are you never to be convinced?' whispers she.

She is leaning against him—gazing up at him, looking pale as the petals of a lily in the soft fading moonlight: such an exquisite face, warm with love's light and pensive with sweet thoughts born more of heaven than earth.

With a heart that throbs with thankful joy, he holds her to him. It seems so strange that this sweet thing should be his own—*her* life at least *half* his—and willing that he should dedicate *all* his to her. There is a humbleness about his devotion that perhaps, unconsciously to herself, renders him even dearer to her. His life has been purified, rounded, completed, since this little saint-like girl, with her happy childish eyes, has crept into his heart.

Still and more silent grows the hour. Over the hills comes the slow dawn, with dainty tread.

A sense of heavy harmonies  
Grows on the growth of patient night  
More sweet than shapen music is.

Bouverie, turning up her face, looks at her long and earnestly. Were ever eyes and soul so sweetly matched? How good, how pure!

A maid so smooth, so white, so wonderful,  
They said a light came from her when she moved.

'You love me?' he says, presently, in a voice so low that the nervous passion in it almost hides the words. But she hears him.

'With all my soul, sweetheart!' she answers back, lifting her head till all the shadowed sweetness of her eyes is bare to him.

'I envy no man on earth,' he says, after a long pause, lifting her soft palms and laying them reverently one by one against his lips.

'And I no woman,' returns she, gravely.

\* \* \* \* \*

Still with the happy lamps of love lit within her beauteous eyes, she regains one of the reception-rooms, and finding Miss Maturin there, seated on a cushioned lounge near an open window, she goes to her, and, leaning over her, whispers some merry nonsense in her ear.

As she does so, she attracts the attention of a spare, elderly, hungry-looking little man at the farther end of the room, the same man whose presence in the early part of the evening had so unnerved Miss Maturin.

He is sitting beside Lady Bouverie—whose guest and cousin he is—and has been, up to this, engrossed with old family topics. But now his mind wanders; his eyes concentrate themselves upon the tableau in the distance—the pretty girl bending, with laughing lips, above the woman who had been so well known to him in the olden days. There is something about the fresh innocent sweetness of Dolores that draws to her the minds of most. Unfortunately, now it compels the admiration of Colonel Oswald. Who is this girl, so like, yet so unlike——

'See that girl over there?' he says, suddenly, to Lady Bouverie. 'She reminds me so strongly of some one. Pretty girl who posed as "Adversity," I mean; just now talking to Miss Maturin.'

'Ah, that is Miss Lorne. Very pretty, as you say, and charming as well.' Lady Bouverie's tone is complacent. She smiles her one smile, which, at its best, is wintry, and looks

calmly important. 'She is Miss Maturin's niece, and her heiress. Very good fortune—indeed, *better* than good—almost colossal.'

'Miss Maturin's niece?' repeats Colonel Oswald, very slowly, very much as though he disbelieves, for the first time, in the perfect hearing on which he prides himself.

'Her sister's child. Lovely creature, isn't she?'

'Ah, I had no idea there was a child,' says Colonel Oswald, thoughtfully. 'Dear me—bless me!'

He seems overcome with surprise. He puts his glass carefully in his left eye and examines Dolores minutely as she stands over there, calm and smiling, a world of rapturous content in her innocent face. That other face that he remembers through her—was it fairer, sweeter? The man, caught and bound by age, gazing at this tender girl just entering upon the unknown sea of life, seems wafted backwards, as by an impetuous breeze, to the glad young years when love was all in all to him, and hope meant certainty. But the love that even then was but half-wounded vanity is now without its sting, and is remembered only as a curious experience never to be forgotten.

'You knew the Maturins, perhaps?' says Lady Bouverie, with unsympathetic manner. 'Yes? Oh, there was a child, of course; Mrs. Lorne's baby—that pretty Dolores over there?'

'It must have complicated matters a good deal,' says Colonel Oswald, still rather dreamily. 'Yes, it was a sad affair altogether.'

'Sad?' Lady Bouverie searches his face for a moment, and then arranges his thoughts for him. 'About the poor child being left an orphan so young? Yes, of course. But then she has really missed so little; her aunt's care has been to her quite that of a mother's.'

'No doubt,' says Colonel Oswald, with a little acquiescent bow. He seems singularly attracted by Dolores. *By Jove!* he says once under his breath; and then aloud, 'Her name? Lorne, I think you said it was?'

'Dolores Lorne.'

'Dolores! What a sad name! How significant! Poor girl, poor girl! But why Lorne, I wonder?'

'Why? You ridiculous man, because it was her father's, of course,' says Lady Bouverie, with a short laugh.

There is some offence in her laugh. It has dawned upon her that Colonel Oswald is hardly giving to her conversation

the undivided attention to which she has grown accustomed.

'Well, I suppose it is as good as another,' says he.

'It is a very good name indeed,' declares Lady Bouverie, now distinctly affronted. 'The Lornes have been always good people; they have ranked for generations with the very best of our county families. And Dolores, as you may see, is thoroughly well-bred.'

'A beautiful face indeed,' says Oswald, thoughtfully. 'But to see her here—*here*! I used to tell myself I was too old to be surprised at anything; but this is just the little too much. And the duchess who is so *very* exclusive.' He has fallen into a muttering tone, and Lady Bouverie scarcely follows him. Then he rouses himself from his reverie. 'How old is she?' he asks, absently.

'You forget the flight of time,' says Lady Bouverie, nodding her head. 'If you knew her when a baby, no wonder you are surprised to see her now breaking into womanhood. The past seems but as yesterday to you and me, until some little fact like this compels us to a knowledge of the truth. She will make a lovely woman. Her age? Seventeen or eighteen, I should say. Not a day more.'

'Ah, that would be about the time,' mutters Colonel Oswald. All his carefully cultivated small-talk seems to have deserted him.

'I must tell you,' says Lady Bouverie, turning to him suddenly and tapping him on the arm with her fan with an elephantine attempt at playfulness, 'that I hope—I think—Indeed—to let you into a secret—I feel *sure* there is something between her and Richard.'

If she had complained of his want of appreciation of her communications before, there is certainly now no longer reason why she should do so. As though suddenly touched by an electric battery, Colonel Oswald springs into life at her words, and gazes at her in blank dismay.

'Yes,' continues she, nodding emphatically, quite pleased by the sensation she has at last created. 'Some day I hope to call that sweet child my daughter-in-law. Only to such an old friend as you would I confide this hope, because as yet she has been very modestly reticent; but I have little doubt the affair has actually arranged itself.'

Colonel Oswald, straightening himself from his lounging position, gazes at her with horrified eyes. An expression not

permissible, and fortunately too low to be heard, passes his lips ; it is the outcome of an agitation not to be suppressed. The pride of birth is strong with him, and this woman is his cousin.

'My dear madam, do you know what you are saying?' he asks at last, with quite a wonderful politeness, considering the state of his mind.

'Why, yes, I hope so,' returns Lady Bouverie, laughing. 'It may be rather precipitate to talk of it, as the young people themselves have not as yet chosen to make the engagement public ; but I am positively certain there is something between my son Richard and the girl you have been'—archly—'so persistently admiring for the last half-hour. I am sorry to blight your hopes, Arthur ; but such I feel sure is the case.'

'I hope so with all my soul!' says Colonel Oswald, with extreme vehemence. 'I hope there is so much between Miss Lorne and any son of yours as will prevent their coming together for all eternity.'

'You mean?' exclaims Lady Bouverie, turning very pale.

'That that poor child over there is the victim of a cruel wrong.'

'Go on!' commands she, with blanched lips, tightening her fingers upon her fan until the ivory pieces snap in twain.

'I mean that she—may the Lord pardon those who wronged her!—was never born in wedlock! She is nameless—illegitimate!'

Lady Bouverie rises to her feet.

'I cannot grasp it all so suddenly,' she murmurs, hoarsely.

'There must be some mistake. I must know more—all!'

'When and where you will,' says the colonel, rising too.

'Follow me into one of these ante-rooms,' says Lady Bouverie, in a choked tone, 'and *quickly*. I feel as if this horrible doubt could never be soon enough allayed.'

'Lead!' returns Oswald, briefly.

By chance her hurried footsteps carry her past Dolores, who is still standing by her aunt, smiling as one might who is in charity with all the world, a look of the most heavenly peace and rest upon her heavenly face. Alas! alas! how short-lived is our joy!

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

My soul is bitter to me . . . .

As their heart's vein whose heart goes nigh to break.

SWINBURNE

GREY sea, grey sky, and barren rock ; above, a sullen heaven ; below, a chilly mist that, creeping ever onwards, covers all the land as with a shroud. The sun is dead ; with heavy wings the sea-gulls beat the air, and sail inland to tell of coming storms and storm just past.

There are glints of watery light upon the pale ocean, now lying spent and wan from last night's passion. Near the shore great walls of foam are still dashing themselves over the small black rocks ; there is even yet a furious anger in the waves as they rush inwards to waste away in yellow foam upon the beach. A weary, moaning, swishing sound comes from the caves, a sound of wrath and pain repressed.

Dolores pacing up and down upon the desolate shore, looks out to sea, and marks how the sullen clouds hang upon the very verge of the horizon.

'More rain,' she says, 'and a coming storm.' She looks a little sad, a little dejected. All last night she had lain awake listening to the howling of the wind and the distant roar from the ocean, mingled with other sounds nearer and sadder ; they had all combined to wreck her slumber. Sleepless she had lain, troubled by the angry night and the sound of wet leaves against a window-pane, and a wind sobbing through a rainy dawn.

Two morns have come and gone since that happy night when she and Dick had stood together in the garden at the castle, beneath the rays of the dying moon.

Presently she seats herself upon a smooth piece of rock, and with a stick begins to draw in idle fashion letters on the sand—letters, and then words ; and then that dearest word of all—Dick.

From this, it is but a simple thing to come to herself, Dolores Bouverie. How pretty it looks and sounds ! She is still staring gravely at it when somebody coming noiselessly up to her on the soft sand places his hand beneath her chin and turns her face to his.

'Ah, Dick,' she says, with a little rapturous blush, holding out glad arms to him.

'Is it for your sins you wander here alone on such a dismal day, my "ladye faire"?' asks he, gaily, seating himself beside her; 'and is all this writing'—gazing at the sand—'a penance? Why, what is this? Dolores Bouverie! Oh, I say—how lovely it sounds!'

'Doesn't it?' says Dolores, flushing with genuine pleasure; then all at once she grows rather pale. 'But it is unlucky to do it, isn't it?' she asks nervously.

'Stuff!' says Mr. Bouverie, with undiminished spirit. 'If you once begin to believe in omens, you will never again know a satisfactory moment—true, I assure you! I knew an Irish fellow once who gave himself up to that sort of thing, and you never knew such a mess as he made of his life. He used to turn quite blue if he saw one magpie, and a piebald horse upset him dreadfully. It appears you ought to wish for something as long as it is in sight *without* thinking of its tail, and it seems he never could manage it, poor fellow. It preyed upon him terribly. My love, how cold your hands are! You shouldn't stay here so long on such a day; and your face—what a sad little face! Has anything vexed you, darling?'

'No, no, I am not vexed; it is only the effect of last night's storm, I suppose. Yet there is a weight here'—laying her small chilly hands upon her breast—'that I cannot account for.'

'Don't try to,' says Dick, comfortably, drawing her nearer to him and tucking both her hands inside his coat by way of warming them.

'But I wish I could,' persists she, miserably. 'It is a horrible depression that has seized upon me, and—and it frightens me. Oh, I *wish* I hadn't written my name so in the sand! Perhaps'—tears rising in her eyes—'I shall never marry you now.'

'Won't you indeed?' exclaims Dick, indignantly. 'Don't try to get out of it in that way, my lady, because it's no good your trying. What a baby you are, Dolores! I believe you find a real luxury in making yourself wretched.'

'Indeed you are wrong,' sighs she, earnestly. 'I hate being wretched; but there is something within me to-day that forbids me to be happy. What is it, Dick? A warning?'

'Digestion,' says Dick, prosaically. 'What did you have for breakfast—eh?'

'An egg,' answers his *fiancée*, thoughtfully, 'and after that some hot cake. Just a little *wee* hot cake, no more.'



'Tis the hot cake,' says Mr. Bouverie, with decision. 'Hot cake is the very——; it is, I do assure you! I give you my word it is.'

But, though he tries to laugh her out of her depression, he yet looks at her very keenly, and grows secretly anxious because of this change in her. It is so unlike his little bright love to talk in this dolorous way.

Then suddenly it occurs to him—in a most unlucky moment—that a little wholesome scolding will do her a world of good. The very thing! No doubt she has never had a scolding in all her life before, so that it will have the virtue of novelty. It will rouse her, and—and perhaps frighten her a bit, and bring her to a healthier frame of mind.

'Look here!' he says, with quite an air. 'I've been jesting up to this; but, do you know, I feel positively *ashamed* of you—I do indeed! One would think by your manner you were the most unhappy girl on earth, whereas you have everything your own way, as it seems to me; you have an aunt who positively adores you, a lover who——'

'A lover indeed!' interrupts Miss Lorne, indignantly. 'Do *you* call yourself a lover? Oh, dear, to think that you should so ill-treat me—you whom I *trusted*!'

Quite a new light has come into her lucent eyes, an angry light. The result of Mr. Bouverie's late manœuvre is perhaps a trifle more pronounced than he has counted upon; I dare say he would have gone upon the rack rather than confess it, but just at this moment it is probable that he is quite as 'frightened' by his 'scolding' as he had hoped she would have been.

'If you are going to be cruel to me,' goes on Miss Lorne, with undiminished wrath, 'you had better go away; I didn't come here to-day to be accused of all sorts of wicked things. To-day, too, when I was so miserable! Oh, it is *more* than one can endure!'

'I really,' begins he, trying fearfully to put in a word or two. But it is of little use for him. She treats him as the atom he has been taught by certain writers to believe himself, and hurries on with her reproaches like a small tornado.

'What *have* I done to you?' she cries. 'No doubt you are tired of me!'

'Dolores!' exclaims poor Dick; but she repulses his warm hand-clasp and looks at him, to the increasement of his misery, with large eyes drowned in tears.

'Oh, go from me, forsake me if you will !' she sobs. 'You are ashamed of me, you say. There, take back your ring. You are *all* my happiness ; but I resign you, I return you to yourself, as you will have it so !'

She has taken the sacred ring from her finger, and now tenders it to him with tremulous lips.

'Oh, fling it into the tide,' says Dick ; 'good enough for it ! If *you* don't want it, where is its use ?'

Then, all in an instant, the little touch of temper that is so strange to her and has so torn her soft heart vanishes.

'Oh, Dick, oh, *Dick*,' she cries, holding out to him her gentle arms, and breaking out into an agonised burst of tears, 'I don't mean it ! How could I be so bad to you, my own, own boy ? I don't know what is the matter with me to-day.'

She sobs unrestrainedly as he gathers her to his heart.

'It is all your headache,' he says, soothingly, 'and this beastly day. I don't feel particularly lively myself, do you know. Nothing so depressing as the sea and murky clouds and so on.'

A sudden colour flames and sinks in her face, and her lips part.

'You are too good for me,' she says, in a tone scarcely audible. 'Even when first I saw you I knew that, yet my heart went out to you, not knowing.

For it was love who came to me,  
Who might not know his name.

'You know it now,' whispers Dick, gently.

'I have made bad use of my knowledge, then. I have been unkind to my love. Oh, Dick, do you think you still love me ?'

'Do you think I still live ?' returns Dick. 'My death alone will end my devotion to you ! Every tear you shed, Dolores, causes me a far keener anguish than it causes you.'

'But you must think me so ill-tempered,' says Miss Lorne, miserably, 'I have been so horribly unjust. Now, do say you think I am the most ill-tempered person you ever met. I'm sure'—tearfully—'I deserve it.'

'Indeed, I shall do nothing of the kind,' exclaims Bouverie, indignantly. 'What a likely thing ! I believe, if there is an angel upon earth, it is your own sweet self.'

'Ah, but there isn't,' says she, slipping her hand into his. So now what do you say ?'

'Not another word will you get out of me to your disparagement,' returns he, laughing.

She is silent for a little time after this, leaning against him and looking out to sea, to where the sullen clouds have dropped upon the horizon.

'I wish I could paint the scene,' she murmurs, presently, 'just as it is now, with you and me together hand in hand. I should call it——'

'What?'

'I was going to say "The Farewell,"' with a swift upward glance; 'but that would not suit us, would it?' She sighs.

'No; there shall be no farewell between us two,' says Bouverie, steadily. 'What ails this day, sweetheart, that it should fret you so? What is there about it——'

'Yes, what?' she asks, eagerly. 'It is in the air and all around me; I *feel* it. "An odour as of love and of love's doom." Oh, that I could tell what lies before me, that I could read my destiny!'

'I'll read it for you—a long and happy life with me. And now, to put an end to this fit of idle speculation, let us come to think of something rational—something that will really put an end to it for ever. Let us name our wedding-day.'

He had expected some slight opposition; but to his surprise, she agrees with his proposition.

'Yes, yes,' she says, quickly.

'This day month?'

'Not *this* day month,' recoiling from him with a little shiver. 'Let our wedding-day have no connection with this one; I mistrust it. Laugh at me as you will, Dick'—looking at him with feverish earnestness—'but I tell you I shall never forget this day to the hour of my death!'

'Don't, my dear,' says Dick, 'if it gives you the least satisfaction to remember it; to me it seems rather a poor affair—but, if you admire it, why, that is everything. But, to return to our subject; to-morrow month, then?'

'If you wish it.'

'If *you* wish it, darling. There is no doubt about me.' He regards her somewhat anxiously. 'You will be *glad* to marry me, Dolores?'

'Yes; I think so, nay, I know it!' says the girl restlessly, turning to him and laying her head upon his breast. 'With you I shall be safe—safe and happy.'

'That is right,' says he, great cheer in his tone. 'And

now to break to my mother this mighty secret that she already knows so well.' He laughs. 'I can see her face when I speak ; her exact intonation is in my ears. "I am rejoiced, Richard, that your choice has fallen upon Miss Lorne ; I have always had grave doubts about your making a marriage that would please me ; your tastes and mine are—er—so utterly dissimilar ; but Dolores is all I could possibly desire."'

His imitation of his mother's cold repulsive manner is perfect ; Dolores smiles faintly.

'You flatter me,' she says. 'When first'—softly—'you told me of your love, a fear of your mother rose within me—an undefined fear ; yet it told me she would be the one to mar our joy. This fear is with me again now more strongly than before ; there is a terrible doubt at my heart.' Her voice falters. 'Dick, don't tell her *to-day* !'

'Pshaw !' says Mr. Bouverie, giving her a loving little shake. 'I decline altogether to listen to any more of your croaking ; come, let me take you home, and mind you get a glass of sherry the moment you go in. I won't let you stay by this "cruel crawling foam" any longer.'

At the wicket-gate that leads into one of the avenues of Greylands they part.

'I'll be with you again this evening,' he tells her, fondly, as he gives her a last caress and sees her safely inside the gate.

But she runs after him when he has gone a little way, and, of her own sweet will, throws her arms round him and kisses him with a loving innocent ardour that delights him.

'See here, Miss Lorne,' he says, holding her a little from him. 'Now that our engagement is to be made public, I must beg of you to cultivate a greater dignity of demeanour. To run after a young man the way you have just done and to throw yourself unsolicited into his arms—oh, I blush for you !'

'I can do it for myself, thank you,' retorts she, saucily, and indeed she colours vividly as she says it, and glances shyly at him. 'Oh, Dick, it wasn't so much to kiss you I wanted as to say that I hope you aren't angry with me about the ring ; you know I didn't mean it, don't you ? You know'—confusedly, turning the button upon his coat round and round with a pretty nervousness—'I would not really have given it back to you—no, not even if you had *asked* for it !'

'Well, that's a bargain!' says Dick, gaily. 'Remember, you have promised not to release me from my allegiance until I ask you to do so, and—not then either! There!'—taking both her hands. 'Good-bye for a little while, you baby, you *love*, and think of me only—as I shall of you—until we meet again!'

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## CHAPTER XIX.

Keep silence now, for singing-time is over.

What help is there?

There is no help, for all these things are so,  
And all the world is bitter as a tear.

SWINBURNE.

Crossing the hall on his way to his mother's apartments, Bouverie comes in contact with Bruno. Later on he remembers how Bruno had started at the meeting, and what a strange change had passed over his face—a great compassion mingled with honest regret.

'Our mother wants to see you, Dick,' he says, with an assumption of easiness evidently forced. But Dick, full of his own happy thoughts, fails to notice it.

'For once then we shall be well met,' he says, gaily. 'I was just on my way to seek her.'

He nods and passes on, but in a moment is aware that Bruno is following him.

'You want me?' he asks, kindly, stopping short again.

Whatever words may have been on Bruno's lips, this direct query prevents his giving them voice.

'A cigarette, if you have one,' he says, somewhat lamely, and in a rather faltering tone. 'Thanks.' Still he hesitates; but seeing that Bouverie is now beginning to regard him with open astonishment, he draws nearer and compels himself to speak.

'She'll be beastly to you, Dick,' he exclaims, with nervous haste—'perfectly beastly! But don't take it to heart too much. Whatever way you may decide—and I think it will be against her—I'll back you up.'

He turns abruptly away, but not before Dick has seen that his eyes are full of tears.

'Those wretched accounts again, no doubt,' muses Bouverie,

looking after him, 'and diatribes against the old steward. Well, if she must rail, she must. But what a good fellow Bruno is to have my interests so near. And so I'm in for a scene with the *mater*. What matter? What does *anything* matter, with happiness so close at hand?'

He almost laughs aloud in real gladness of heart as he turns the corner of the corridor that brings him to his mother's door.

She is sitting before a davenport, an open letter in her hand. There is something in her expression as she turns slowly round to acknowledge his presence that suggests danger to Dick.

'Somebody has been at it again!' he mutters to himself, as he comes forward with a courteous smile upon his lips.

'At last you are here!' says Lady Bouverie, coldly. 'I have sent messengers for you everywhere—even to Greylands, where I believed you might be found; but——'

'A most natural conclusion,' interrupts Dick, laughing. 'Mother, we owe you perhaps an apology for so long concealing from you our love; but——'

'We! Who?' asks Lady Bouverie, stepping back a pace or two, and laying her hand heavily upon the arm of a fauteuil near.

'Dolores and I,' says Bouverie, gently. 'Of our affection for each other you have been of course aware, but the public declaration of it has been delayed until now. I have come here to tell you she has done me the honour to accept me, and that we are to be married——'

'*Never!*' exclaims Lady Bouverie, with curious distinctness.

Her tone is neither hurried nor excited. The fateful word drops from her in a cold prophetic way that startles him more than he is aware. He lifts his head to speak: but she checks him by an imperious gesture, and, before he has time to recover himself, has poured into his ears the sad, sad story Colonel Oswald has related to her. The truth is indeed thus rudely thrust upon him before he has had time to realise that there is truth to be revealed.

'Who told you this infamous story?' he asks at last, in a tone that unnerves her a little, clothed about though she is with the armour of an utter heartlessness. Bouverie has grown deadly pale; he is leaning against the marble mantelpiece with downcast eyes, and is biting his lip as if to compel the return of blood to it.

'Colonel Oswald.'

‘Oswald! What should he know of her?’

‘Fortunately for you, he was mixed up with the Maturins at one time, or this wretched conspiracy to get you to marry the girl and give her an honest name might have been successful.’

‘*Fortunately* for me?’ repeats Dick.

A low, bitter laugh breaks from him. He clenches his right hand until the nails almost force the blood from the palm, and stands rigid, waiting for what he yet must hear. Ah, how he had feared death for her! But shame—*shame*!

‘It appears that Oswald was actually in love with this girl’s miserable mother at one time. She threw him over, I believe, or something of that sort; and——’

‘And now he is having his revenge? A noble one! Vengeance on the poor dead! The more one knows of Oswald the more one gets to respect him.’

‘Melodrama is out of place here,’ says his mother, icily. ‘And you should remember he has done you a service by exposing this disgraceful plot, for which you should be eternally grateful.’

‘Have you only this man’s word for all this?’

‘Knowing the obstinacy of your disposition, I was prepared for that question. If you wish further proofs, I have decided on going to Miss Maturin myself—unpleasant though such a duty must naturally be—to demand the truth from her own lips.’

‘She may deny it,’ exclaims Dick, eagerly, a gleam of hope illumining his pale face for a moment. It is a very faint gleam, and dies almost as it is born.

‘She will not’—coldly. ‘This morning I induced Oswald to go to her.’

‘To go to *her*? To speak to her on such a subject as that?’ exclaims Dick, starting back from her, horror and aversion in his gaze. ‘Good Heavens! And she said——’

‘Nothing to the purpose, except that she would receive me at any hour I should appoint. No more than that. But her manner,’ he said, ‘was sufficient. She looked stricken to death! As well she might’—sternly. ‘The discovery of such a scandalous deception should cover any woman with everlasting shame. When we *do* meet, I shall certainly tell her what I think of her,’ concludes Lady Bouverie, with calm vindictiveness.

‘Is that part of your duty too?’ asks her son in a curious

tone. Then he covers his face with his hand. 'Oh, poor soul,' he mutters, 'how she loves that girl! And now——'

A little dull colour has crept into his mother's cheeks; faint crimson lines that tell of deepest anger. Her pale eyes take a steely shade. Yet there is, too, a miserable smile of half-pleasurable excitement upon her cold face. Evidently this encounter with Miss Maturin is not altogether so distasteful to her as she would have it seem.

'Colonel Oswald tells me she was a most pitiable spectacle,' she goes on, regarding her son fixedly. 'If I were you, Richard, I think I should reserve my sympathy for some one better than an exposed swindler.' A slow sneer curls her lips.

'Oswald is a brave man!' says Bouverie, with a harsh, unmirthful laugh. The latter part of his mother's speech has passed unheard by him. 'I wonder what most men would have taken to perform such a service as that for you?'

'You can regard his conduct in any light you will,' returns she, with a shrug. 'He fortunately knew but little of your infatuation for this young lady, or perhaps he might have withheld his story. Your engagement—of which I was allowed to know *nothing*'—with an injured wave of her hand—'was also of course unknown to him. Now, as it must necessarily come to an end, perhaps it was as well we were all so wilfully left in ignorance of it.'

'To an end?' repeats Dick, dreamily; he hardly knows what he says. Once more he is back again with his darling on the stormy beach, listening to her sad voice, her plaintive forebodings that, alas, *alas*, have been so cruelly verified!

Seeing him thus, calm and apparently convinced, Lady Bouverie mistakes his silence for submission, and her heart beats high with the hope of coming triumph.

'Certainly to an end,' she declares. 'In a little time you will learn to forget you ever had the misfortune to meet her.'

'Shall I?' says Dick, still dreamily, still with his soul filled with the last words his little pretty love had said to him.

'We have now only to consider,' ponders Lady Bouverie, thoughtfully, 'the best way to get out of it.'

'The best way to break her heart you mean?' slowly lifting his head.

'I beg you will be sensible,' returns his mother, severely. 'All this is a great worry to me, and I must really ask you to help, instead of hindering me in my efforts to assist you out of a most unpleasant affair. You have brought it all upon your-



self, remember ; I have been purposely kept in the dark all along for reasons perfectly apparent to me now ; Miss Maturin's machinations have been brought to light ; and you should certainly thank me for my readiness to give you any help in my power. Not that I look for gratitude from you, Richard ; that would be too much to expect. All my life I have been deeply grieved by a want of sympathy on your part. Still, when occasion arises, I cannot forget I am a mother.'

She pauses after this, and tries to conjure up a tear ; but tears and she have been strangers for so long that now they refuse to answer to her call.

'I don't imagine you will have any difficulty in breaking off your—friendship with her,' she goes on, presently, seeing Dick makes no effort to reply.' 'She will see at once that this marriage can never take place.'

'No ?' questions he, in a low tone ; 'and yet she is the same perfect creature she was yesterday—without spot or blemish !'

'Spot—blemish !' repeats Lady Bouverie, regarding him with angry contempt. 'Considering all things, I must say that your words are very inappropriately chosen. Do you fully understand the—the hideousness of the story you have just heard ?'

'Why cannot it be hushed up ?' asks the young man, lifting his haggard eyes to hers. Once more in the dull misery of his face she reads victory, and rejoices in it ; but his mind has again wandered far from his present surroundings and is lost in a mournful speculation as to how best to keep this wretched story from Dolores's ears. Oh, horrible ! If this vile thing should chance to come to her, to darken, to sully for ever her fair soul !

'Of course it must be hushed up,' consents Lady Bouverie, magnanimously. 'None of *us* will repeat it. Your family should be the last to blazon it abroad, and I suppose Miss Maturin will have the grace to leave Greylands as soon as possible. You must contrive to end your acquaintance there in some plausible, honourable way that will spare the girl.'

'Oh, as for the honour,' says Dick ; then changing his tone with such rapidity that she scarcely heeds the sharp vehemence of his first words, he continues quietly, 'What I fail to see is how this news affects Dolores, how it changes her, what alteration it makes in her nature, her——'

'Social position, perhaps ?' puts in Lady Bouverie, with an

insolent cruelty. 'None—except that society is unfortunately prejudiced in favour of people born in wedlock. True, she has the same eyes, the same hair she had yesterday; but for the rest—Pah! My dear Richard, let us be sensible! When I believed this girl to be as well born as she has been treacherously represented, I was quite willing you should pay your addresses to her—her fortune being all one could desire; but now!'—she spreads out her hands in an eloquent fashion that makes further explanation unnecessary.

'Besides her hair and eyes, she has that fortune still,' says Dick, making a last attempt to smooth matters for his poor love.

'Had she the mines of Golconda I should refuse to receive her as my daughter,' declares Lady Bouverie, haughtily, rising to her feet.

Dick breaks into an odd defiant laugh and flings out his arms impulsively, as though thrusting from him some hateful vision.

'That is a pity,' he says, distinctly, 'because I shall most certainly marry her!'

The silence that follows upon his words is so deep that it is almost painful. Lady Bouverie, still standing, and pale to the lips, regards her son with flashing eyes. This is a greater mutiny than ever she had dreamed of. She had counted on hesitation and vain pleadings, but such rank rebellion—never!

'If this be acting, it is admirable,' she says at last, in a voice scarcely audible, 'but ill-timed. Marry! *Marry* her, with this slur, this stigma upon her?'

'Ay, were the slur as great again! What! Is she to be condemned and cast aside—she, with her white soul and guileless mind—because of—of——'

He hesitates.

Lady Bouverie laughs aloud.

'Yes, it is difficult of expression, is it not?' she says, with a cruel sneer. 'Yet you will have to put it into words sooner or later; your friends will naturally be anxious to hear all about your wife's parentage. But this is only a sorry jest of yours!' exclaims she, turning upon him fiercely. 'You would not *dare* to do this thing!'

'Do not mistake me for a moment,' returns Bouverie, calmly. 'I seldom jest, and *never* on subjects close to my heart.'

'Are you *mad*?' cries she, moving a little nearer to him.

‘Would any sane man contemplate such a deed? What glamour has been cast upon you?’

‘I love her, and she loves me,’ replies Dick, simply. ‘It is the glamour that rules the world and makes it sweet.’ A little rapt look comes into his face. ‘Soon it shall be my joy, my *privilege*, to shield her from all scorn.’

‘When you speak so, it is mere folly. The world is all around us, and through the very deepest love—the most careful guarding—its scorn will pierce; and do not dream she will outlive this thing. The shame born with her will cling to her until her dying day.’

‘The more reason why I too should cling to her,’ says Bouverie, steadily. ‘Poor little innocent child!’

‘You stand there before me, and presume to tell me you really mean marriage with her?’

‘Certainly I do.’

‘And you will bring this girl, this outcast, this *Pariah*——’

Her burst of vehement insolence is brought to as vehement a conclusion. Bouverie, striding forward, lays his hand upon her wrist with a sudden vehement pressure. His nostrils are dilated, his whole face white with unrepressed rage. At this moment it is impossible not to notice the strange likeness that exists between mother and son.

‘Be silent!’ he breathes, in a low voice. ‘Not another word. I *forbid* you to use such epithets again towards the woman I love.’

‘A son forbid a mother!’ frowns she, shaking her arm free of his grasp. ‘I have yet to learn that I owe you obedience.’

‘Perhaps I am wrong,’ returns he, with a terrible weariness, lifting his hand to his head; ‘but misery is overcoming me. Oh, mother, if this thing should come to her ears! If she should hear of it——’

His voice fails him. There is an agonised entreaty in his eyes that must have touched any heart but hers.

‘She need not hear of it,’ she says, coldly. ‘If you so dread pain for her, you can easily avert it.’

‘But how?’ asks he, regarding her piteously. His *own* mother, surely she will have mercy!

‘By putting an end at once to this most mistaken engagement,’ answers she, with cold emphasis. ‘Agree to this scheme, and the girl need know nothing. Persist in it, and I shall feel it my duty as a mother to go to her, explain all, and ask her to release you.’

'You would go to her !' repeats he, falling back as though stricken ; then recovering himself, he straightens his figure as one might who is just recovering from some foolish fright, and looks at her kindly. 'Dear mother, unsay that, at least,' he says, a thrill of indescribable horror in his tone. 'I know you did not mean it.'

'You are wrong, then ; I do mean it,' returns she, unmoved.

'Are you a fiend or a woman,' cries he, with a burst of uncontrollable passion, 'that you can thus coldly even *think* on such a thing ? To go to that child, to pour into her ears words that will poison all the freshness of her young life, that will kill for ever all the sweet happiness that thrills through every vein ! Oh, no, it is not possible ! You—you to do this thing ! You, who have looked into her innocent eyes and marked the happy smile upon her perfect lips ! You, who only last week extolled all these charms and made open mention of them ! You, who knew of our love——'

'You forget !'—icily. 'Of your own free will you kept me in the dark. I knew *nothing* of it. Always remember that. I knew nothing.'

'To your mercy,' says Bouverie, after a lengthened and curious gaze at her, 'I no longer appeal. It has failed me. Before we part, however, I would tell you that my allegiance to my love can know no change. And now a last word. I do not think—I do not accuse you of really meaning all that you have said ; but'—his face grows rigid, and his teeth meet—'but—*hear me*—if by your means this unfortunate tale should come to Dolores's ears, remember this, that you wilfully and of your own accord broke between us all ties. I shall no longer be your son ; I shall forget that you were ever—my mother.'

Lady Bouverie's hands tremble slightly as they rest upon the chair near her ; but her face remains impassive.

'For this dutiful speech,' she says, 'I have to thank Miss—I mean the girl Dolores. Really'—with an insolent smile—'one forgets at times that she no longer has a name !' Then pointing imperiously to the door—'Go !' she says. 'I have done with you !'

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## CHAPTER XX.

Now hath hope, outraced in running,  
Given the torch up of his cunning  
And the palm he thought to wear  
Even to his own strong child—despair.

There is not one upon life's weariest way  
Who is weary as I am weary of all but death.

SWINBURNE.

LADY BOUVERIE's threat to her son to go down to Greylands and interview Miss Maturin on the subject of this sad tragedy that has fallen into his life proves no idle one. To order her carriage, dress herself with almost unusual care, and start on her unholy expedition is but the work of a few minutes. No womanly hesitation, no godly shrinking for such godless work, stays her. An overpowering desire to bring down shame upon the head of her rebellious son urges her forward. She will either gain the victory over him, or leave him abased in the eyes of the world so dear to her.

As she enters the library at Greylands, Miss Maturin rises instinctively to her feet. She is looking pale and haggard. There is a world of mournful expectancy in her face, a strange outward gaze at things that she would fend from her, were that possible.

Fear and misery mark her. It seems, indeed, as though a lifetime has swept over her since last she and Lady Bouverie stood thus face to face. The old proud sweet graciousness is gone from her, and she looks crushed, despoiled of hope, of peace, of all that makes life pleasant to the soul.

But yesterday, and she had been a comely smiling woman, holding old age—that barren desert—as still far away from her in a region yet untraversed. To-day she is feeble, broken, already entered on the unloved heritage; standing shrinking on the outskirts of it, with the last shreds of youth and hope lying well behind.

She makes no attempt to greet her visitor beyond that involuntary uprising. She makes no step towards her. All her bravery and her high courage have forsaken her, and there is something almost terrible in the timidity of the glance she casts at Lady Bouverie.

She stands irresolute, supplication in her whole form ; her head bowed upon her breast, her body slightly bent, her hands clasped together with a convulsive pressure.

To see her stand thus—humbled, speechless—creates in Lady Bouverie's breast a sense of vindictive pleasure. The poor soul is pleading voicelessly for the happiness of the creature who makes *her* happiness—waiting hopelessly for a mercy that some kind inner spirit warns her will not be granted ! To Lady Bouverie it is even exhilarating to know that the waiting *is* hopeless, and that the most passionate prayer for mercy will fall on sterile ground.

'This is a very unpleasant affair,' she says, at last breaking the silence, and speaking in her clearest, most staccato tone.

Miss Maturin, lifting her melancholy eyes, regards her wistfully.

'A very *sad* one,' she murmurs, in a voice scarcely audible. She unlocks her fingers and points to a chair. Lady Bouverie sinks languidly into it.

'Ah ! Doubtless it is so from your point of view,' she says, indifferently, unfurling her fan. 'How warm it is to-day—quite tropical ! No, thanks, no—one window is sufficient. Well, you see, it was to talk over this—er—"sad" affair'—with a little bow meant as a recognition of Miss Maturin's point of view—'that I have come over here to-day. I think it always better to get to the root of an ugly matter at once, don't you ?'

If she had been discussing the last new poaching affray with a companion as unconcerned in the affair as herself, she could hardly have displayed greater coolness. Miss Maturin, as though incapable of speech, makes some faint movement with her hand that stands for a reply.

'No matter how distressing a thing may be to me,' goes on Lady Bouverie, in a self-righteous tone, 'I never shrink from my duty. And really I have suffered more through this—er—uncomfortable report than I can describe. Very great annoyance has been mine.' She leans back in her seat, and there is almost an audacious claim for sympathy in her highly uplifted brows and drooped lips. 'Now you—who know all about it—will kindly give me an exact idea of how the true story runs.'

'What is there to tell ?' asks Miss Maturin, wearily.

'The truth'—promptly. 'Whatever it may be, I have tutored myself—as a *mother*—to hear and receive it. I assure you'—with a self-regretful shake of her head—'I should not

dream of mixing myself with such a—a—forgive me—questionable imbroglio as this, did I not feel it to be imperative upon me, for my son's safety, to listen to a succinct account of the whole matter from reliable lips.'

'Colonel Oswald's lips are reliable,' says Miss Maturin, without lifting her head.

'Ah, but yours—for a headstrong boy—carry so much more weight!' persists Lady Bouverie, with a careful smile. 'And you may have perhaps noticed'—dropping into quite a confidential tone—'that my son Richard has of late imagined himself to possess a somewhat exaggerated friendship for Miss—for, your niece.'

'Not *friendship*!' returns Miss Maturin, softly.

'Don't depreciate it; it is, I assure you, a very great friendship,' says Lady Bouverie, still smiling. 'But, great as it is, I fear it must cease from to-day.'

Miss Maturin starts and, if possible, grows a shade paler than before.

'Yes, from to-day,' repeats Lady Bouverie, the cold society smile still upon her lips. 'And to insure this arrangement, I look to you for assistance.'

'To me?' cries Miss Maturin, faintly.

'You! Of course,' goes on Lady Bouverie, shutting up her fan with a little click. 'You see it is absolutely necessary that Richard should be convinced that no falsity lies in the statement made to me by Colonel Oswald about Miss Lorne. *You* are the one to confirm all that he has said.'

She leans back in her seat, and gazes with calm scrutinising eyes upon her victim. A dull colour flames into Miss Maturin's cheeks. Hitherto she had been standing; now she sinks upon a lounge near her, as though physically unable longer to support her own weight.

'You would have *me* be her murderer!' she exclaims, in an untranslatable voice. Then a moment later—'It is impossible!' She covers her face with her hands, and a dry sob bursts from her. 'Yet stay!' she cries suddenly, a feverish light coming into her eyes. 'I am wrong. You shall hear all the pitiful tale of my child's birth, and make what evil use of it you may! Her happiness'—solemnly—'lies not in my hands or yours, but in his—your son's—keeping. Let *him* be true and all the world false, and still some joy may be hers.'

'You mean?' begins Lady Bouverie, angrily, forgetting her assumed rôle of calmness and half starting to her feet.

'What I have said,' replies Miss Maturin, slowly, absently. 'Let him hear the entire truth. Let nothing be withheld. Then, if the strain be too great—why *then*——' An expression of agony crosses her face, but she does not continue the sentence. 'But, if, when he hears all,' she goes on hurriedly, 'he still remains faithful, there is yet before her—hope!'

She ceases abruptly, as though lost in some train of happy thought too bright for the soul's consumption.

'I trust I misunderstand you,' breaks in Lady Bouverie, with haughty displeasure. 'But, if you really imagine that any son of mine would wittingly ally himself with dishonour and disgrace, you wofully miscalculate, and raise within yourself false hopes that no earthly power can realise.'

'And yet there is something about him—Dick,' says Miss Maturin, dreamily—'that still bids me hope. And, in truth, madam'—turning to her with sad dignity—'there is that in the mournful story I am about to relate to you that might well soften any heart towards the innocent child who alone survives the storm to battle with the shame connected with it. But I crave no pity from you!' she exclaims, breaking off abruptly. 'Hear this story, and repeat it to your son if you will, and let *him* decide if love be strong enough to crush the fear of the world!'

Lady Bouverie flings her fan upon the table with a little crashing noise, and, leaning back in her seat, folds her hands tightly.

'Now for your story,' she says, contemptuously.

'Nineteen years ago there came to the village, near which I and my sister lived, a young man. He called himself an artist, and certainly did some pretty dabbling in water-colours. He was, as I have said, young; he was handsome, in a womanish fashion, and of pleasing manners.' Here she ceases speaking for a moment, as though compelled to it, and then breaks forth again. 'He was a *devil*!' she says, in a low voice, quick with concentrated passion. It is as though these last words are wrung from her anguished heart.

'Oh, pray be calm,' entreats Lady Bouverie, with a lady-like shrinking from a scene of any kind. 'It is all very—er—horrible, no doubt; but let us be calm, whatever we are. Nothing is to be gained by violence.'

'His name was James Belton,' goes on Miss Maturin, precisely as if she had not heard the other's delicate appeal, as doubtless she had not, being lost in miserable memories of her own.



'James Belton?' repeats Lady Bouverie, thoughtfully, as one committing something to memory. 'But why not Lorne, my dear Miss Maturin? Your niece's—er—assumed name is—'

'Entirely different from his,' interrupts Miss Maturin, feverishly. 'I tell you I would for ever have obliterated his name from the earth if such a thing were in my power; and to let *her* bear it would have seemed to me like desecration.'

She grows quieter again presently, and her eyes go back to their old monotonous unseeing contemplation of the carpet.

'Well, he came; and, through the vicar of our parish, we got to know him. My sister was fond of painting, and an intimacy sprang up between them. She was a young girl then, gentle, innocent, devoid of all knowledge of intrigue. But he was a subtle teacher! What he really was—or who—I never knew then or later, except that the sun never shone upon so fair-faced a demon!

'Just at that time I was summoned to Rome. My uncle, an old man, lay dying there. He was wealthy. To secure greater advantages to the sister I so loved, and, in truth, because I pitied the friendless old man, I obeyed his summons and hastened to his sick-bed. He lingered longer than one would need for the commencement and termination of many a love-tale or tragedy; and, when at last kind death released him and me, and left me free to seek my English home once more, it was to find that time in my absence had created for *me* tragedy, and that home was home no longer. An empty nest awaited me! It was shorn of its brightest treasure. The being who had been all in all to me since my mother's death had betrayed me. She had gone away—*unwedded*—with James Belton. Oh, the shame of it!' cries she, in a voice sharp with pain, flinging out her hands in an unconscious protest against fate. There is at this moment strong upon her a cruel reflex of that terrible far-off time when first dishonour came to her.

'Very unpleasant—really distressing!' murmurs Lady Bouverie. 'You perhaps followed her?'

'There was no clue—nothing—only a line or two from her, to say she had been compelled to fly with him, as his uncle, from whom he had expectations, and who had arranged a marriage for him with some heiress, would disinherit him were he to disobey his orders; so, for the sake of worldly gain, he sacrificed a human life.'

'I beg you will not excite yourself,' says Lady Bouverie, applying a dainty smelling-bottle to her aristocratic nose. 'It is, after all, only a very ordinary occurrence belonging to every-day life—it is, I assure you—though I grieve to acknowledge it of the world in which I hold a part. Women are so mistaken !'

'And men are so wicked !' supplements Miss Maturin, sternly, though perhaps no woman born was ever a kinder or better friend to young men than she. 'But it is not to moralise that I so stand before you. Hear me to the end. When a whole miserable year had dragged by without word or sign from my sister ; when I had arrived at the conclusion that all my searchings were of no avail, a letter came to me in her handwriting, but so faint, so feeble, as to be almost illegible. It was addressed from a small village in Brittany. I went to her. That journey, short as it may sound to you, will live in my brain for ever—ay, death itself will not quench the remembrance of it. You see my hair !' cries she, lifting her hands to her iron-grey head. 'I was but twenty-six then ; yet, when I got to that journey's end, it was no less white than it is now.'

'And when you did arrive,' asks Lady Bouverie, careless of the other's anguish, and anxious only to know the result of the meeting, 'what did she say ?'

'She was dead,' says Miss Maturin.

A singular silence follows this solemn announcement, broken at last by Miss Maturin.

'Quite dead,' she says, in a dull way—'dead for an hour at least. Such a little time it seemed, but yet it carried her beyond all recall. I stooped over her ; and, as I did so, a faint cry came to me. I pulled down the clothes ; there—*there* a baby lay upon her breast. It was alive. It is impossible I should describe to you the sense of comfort, of hope, of *courage* I sustained as I heard that feeble cry issuing, as it were, from the very dead herself. It was part of her—a recognition to me from her from that invisible untraversable land to which she had gone. I lifted the baby and laid her upon my heart. There she has lain ever since.'

'No doubt Providence is all-wise,' remarks Lady Bouverie, with a pious but protesting lift of her brows ; 'but, if that poor infant had shared its—er—most inconsiderate mother's grave, how much better it would have been for itself and every one else.'

'Not for me,' says Miss Maturin, slowly. 'I thank God for the day when, in His great mercy, He gave her to me to be the joy and solace of my life. But let me give you the termination of my sorry tale. There was nothing among my unhappy sister's clothes to prove from where she had come to this foreign land. Her clothes were not poor—there was indeed no sign of poverty in all her surroundings; yet how could I doubt that she had been forsaken, abandoned, cast aside, when some newer toy arose? In death she looked lovely. There were no marks of waste or disease. She had simply given her life for the child, which knowledge somehow—I can't explain it—made the child even dearer to me. It was as if the mother's spirit, tender, repentant, had passed into the frail creature she left behind her when she sought the world of shadows. I saw her buried. I then took the child; and shortly afterwards I went abroad.'

'A wise precaution; yet here it has failed, most fortunately for my son,' says Lady Bouverie, who has listened to the foregoing narrative without so much as one throb of pity. Every point in the case she has carefully taken into her brain, to be retailed to Dick later on. Her purpose in coming is still her purpose now—to present to her son such a succession of disgraceful details as will kill within him all desire to ally himself with anyone closely connected with them.

'Your son must answer for himself,' says Miss Maturin, slowly.

'My son will hardly care to commit a *bêtise* that must necessarily separate him from his family.'

'*Would* it be separation?' asks Miss Maturin, passionate entreaty in her eyes. 'Is Society inexorable? She is so beautiful—she has the nature of a very saint! Will not these things plead for her?' There is a wistfulness in her gaze that might have melted a heart of stone—but not Lady Bouverie's heart.

'She is like her mother, I presume,' she returns, coldly. It is probable that this is meant more for a reminder than a sneer, but it maddens Miss Maturin.

'She is like all that is good and true and innocent,' she cries, vehemently, her dark eyes flashing. 'Whatever be the story of her birth, she is herself a perfect creature beyond all price.'

'That depends on the price,' suggests Lady Bouverie with an insolent smile; 'you forget she inherits her mother's blood.'

The entire coarseness of this remark hardly reaches Miss

Maturin, who has grown confused with the day's misery. But that something has been said to disparage her idol is clear to her.

'Whatever her story may be,' she says, rising to her feet and advancing towards Lady Bouverie, 'I must insist that you will treat her—absent or present—with respect.'

'Her story!' exclaims Lady Bouverie, throwing down the gauntlet at last, and in turn pushing back her chair and standing haughtily erect. 'I wonder you are not ashamed to allude to it. Knowing'—with a wicked sneer—'this *story*, you brought her here! You allowed my son to make love to her! You deliberately planned a marriage between them—a marriage with *her—her!*'

No words could express the insolence that her emphasis on the pronoun conveys to Miss Maturin.

'It was a fraud, a swindle!' goes on Lady Bouverie, carried away by her loosed passion, so long pent up. 'You threw her into the decent society around you, knowing well it would recoil from her as from a pestilence were the truth known to it. You inveigled my son into an acquaintance here. You drew him into your net, hoping to wed him to this nameless girl, and so cover her shame by bestowing upon her the shadow of a stainless ancestry. You would have forced upon us this base-born girl, with——'

Miss Maturin, laying her hand suddenly upon Lady Bouverie's arm, checks her words and forces her backwards until once again she sinks into her seat.

'Not another word!' she whispers, hoarsely. 'Of *me*—what you will; but of her—*nothing!*'

She loosens her grasp and stands back a little, though without removing her eyes from her adversary.

'If the concealment was a sin,' she goes on deliberately—'if it was a crime to seek to restore that poor child to the position to which she should have been entitled—why, sin I did! But, mind you, I do not repent it. I feel no remorse; I am disheartened only in that I have failed.'

'It was a crime,' says Lady Bouverie, with slow vindictiveness, 'for which I am almost certain you could be punished by law.'

For a full minute Miss Maturin's eyes rest searchingly on hers. Then——

'Go home, woman,' she exclaims, with cold contempt, 'and pray upon your knees to God, to grant you a better mind!'

She turns from her.

'Let me fully understand you,' insists Lady Bouverie, a dark flush rising to her face. 'Do you decline to put an end to this engagement between my son and your niece? Do you absolutely refuse to deny him access to your house?'

'Absolutely,' returns Miss Maturin. 'Let him act as he will. I shall neither help nor hinder him.'

'This is your final decision?'

'It is.'

'Then I shall have recourse to other means to save my son,' says Lady Bouverie, in a low, threatening tone. 'If such means prove displeasing to you, remember *you brought them on yourself*.'

Silence, and then a little rush as of cold wind—the sound as of soft footsteps on the balcony outside, a fresh sweet voice lilting some happy lay. When again will that pretty voice be uplifted in careless song?

Dolores, stooping daintily to get beneath the half-raised sash of the central window, steps into the room.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

Thou hadst thy short sweet fill of half-blown joy.

And know not what thing evil I have done  
That life should lay such heavy hand on me.

SWINBURNE.

WITH soft roughened hair and smiling eyes, she advances towards them, some gaudy wild flowers in her hands. The day seems to have grown suddenly dark, there is the scent of storm, near and vehement, in the air that comes with her through the window. Outside, the clouds are massed together in a sullen grandeur; there is a fearful stillness in the shrubberies—a strange pause, as if nature is gathering herself together for some mighty effort. A frightened bird fluttering past the open space hides timorously in the branches of the myrtles.

Advancing to greet Lady Bouverie, Dolores happens to glance at her aunt, and is so startled by the wild look of horror upon her face that involuntarily she stands still and gazes irresolutely from Miss Maturin to her visitor, and back again.

'What is it?' she asks, at last, in a low, troubled tone, the

nervousness that has followed her all day growing now almost unbearable.

Lady Bouverie turns as though to address her ; but Miss Maturin, by a sudden passionate movement, checks her.

‘Not a word to *her*—not a word !’ she cries, fiercely.

‘Stay, auntie,’ murmurs Dolores, softly, raising one little hand and holding it out from her palmways with all the pretty slender fingers extended as if in childish protest. ‘Let Lady Bouverie speak. What can she have to say to me’—with gentle dignity—‘that I may not hear ?’

Her voice is sweet and low and plaintive as usual ; but her heart is beating wildly.

‘I have that to say that you *must* hear,’ declares Lady Bouverie, remorselessly.

She is untouched by the girl’s gentleness. The pale, pathetic little face stirs within her no feeling of compassion. Pity, that heaven born thing, is unknown to her.

‘Do not listen to her, Dolores—do not listen !’ exclaims Miss Maturin, vehemently, who seems to have lost all self-control. As she speaks she steps between Dolores and Lady Bouverie with her arms extended towards the former, as though she would protect her from all evil.

‘She *shall* listen !’ says Lady Bouverie, imperiously. ‘Take it well to heart, madam, that through *your* fault she has now to learn the miserable truth from a comparative stranger.’

‘Dolores !’ breathes Miss Maturin, with a last faint effort at calmness, ‘I command you to leave the room.’

‘And *I* command you to stay,’ retorts Lady Bouverie, fixing her gaze upon the poor pale child standing before them with trembling lips and large, bewildered eyes. ‘You have been too long kept in ignorance of the truth. It is time you should know that you are no fit wife for any well-born man.’

‘Madam !’ exclaims Dolores ; she draws up her slender figure with a slow haughtiness that becomes her, and turns cold offended eyes upon Lady Bouverie, ‘I can say nothing to such a charge as that. I have only to wait and hear what wretched mistake has induced you to utter such cruel words ; to—to so far forget yourself !’

Her smile has long since faded, and her colour has followed it. All the fresh sweet flush of youth has died away into that grasping grave that is so soon to swallow every other touch of gladness that she knows. Her parted lips are pale as death

itself. All the frail, scented wildings of the wood she had so cherished on her homeward way now fall from her nerveless grasp—as all her fondest earthly hopes are falling—to lie crushed and dying at her feet.

Yet even at this very last moment she rallies a little, and some thought of angry pride flings a crimson tint into her pallid cheeks. Miss Maturin marking this sign of emotion and mistaking it, lays her hand upon the girl's arm.

'Go,' she says, with deepest entreaty.

'It is too late,' returns Dolores, with a curious smile, never removing her gaze from Lady Bouverie.

'Hear the truth, then,' says the latter, in a quick tone; 'and let any one'—with a slow triumphant glance at Miss Maturin—'deny it if they dare.'

And then all at once, coldly, with no attempt at palliation, the terrible truth is laid bare to one who up to this had been almost ignorant that such sad dishonours might exist; and now!—her own mother!

Where now is the crimson blush, the sweet haughty glance? Alas for the happy childish soul that shall know the riches of its first unhurt youth never again!

A sickly pallor overspreads her cheek, her eyes dilate. Ah, how true had been those sad forebodings—those warnings they might be called—that had haunted her as she sat a while ago beside her lover, watching the incoming of the sad sea-waves! At last the indefinite shadow, the intangible cloud, that has lain so long and in such a vague fashion upon her young life, has been lifted, only to lay bare to her shrinking soul the hideousness of the secret it had covered.

She still stands motionless before them, making no effort to hide her blanched face; but all the gracious brightness of her seems killed. She looks tired, and worn, and broken.

Making a violent effort, she removes her shocked gaze from Lady Bouverie and turns desperately to Miss Maturin.

'It is not true, auntie—not *true*!' she gasps, in a choked voice, holding out to her her little hands in a forlorn fashion. 'Oh, speak—speak—SPEAK!'

But no comfort comes to her; Miss Maturin's lips part indeed, but only a groan issues from them. She tries to form a sentence, a word even, but power is denied her. Seeing her agitation, Dolores knows that hope is at end. But even at this supreme moment love sways her; noting the agony in her aunt's face, a divine pity fills her breast.

'Ah!' she cries, with sharp but sweet haste. 'Do not say it! I know all.'

'This explanation, so iniquitously withheld from you for so long a time, is necessarily very painful,' says Lady Bouverie, nervously. For once her self-possession seems to have deserted her. She appears absolutely afraid to lift her eyes and mark the result of her day's work. As she so stands, with downcast lids, battling indignantly with this absurd new nervousness, she and Dolores seem to have changed places. *She* is the culprit, the pale stricken girl before her the accuser.

'I should not,' she goes on, in a stammering fashion, 'have felt it my duty to be the one to waken you to so sad a fact in your life's history, but—that——' She pauses at a loss for words to complete her cruel task.

'You have something more to say to me—say it,' says the girl, coldly. Even to herself her voice sounds strange, far-off, strained. It is as entirely without passion, however, as it is without hope.

'It is about Richard,' replies Lady Bouverie, growing more and more confused beneath the steady gaze of those lustrous, melancholy eyes. 'The relations existing between you and him—of which, however'—hastily—'I know nothing—not being taken into your confidence—not though I am his mother——' She breaks off somewhat incontinently here, and beats her foot angrily against the floor. The anger is self-directed. How is it that she finds herself in her hour of need so utterly devoid of the cold, smooth eloquence that has undone so many a foe?

'You allude to our engagement,' says Dolores, very calmly, though her heart seems to have been caught in a sudden cold grasp. 'Yes? Go on.'

'If it *was* an engagement,' says Lady Bouverie, sharply—'as I have said, I know nothing—it must now come to an end. It must be an engagement no longer.'

Dolores, lifting her hand to her head with a sudden passionate movement, runs her fingers through her soft hair, as though action of some sort is forced upon her. This little gesture is full of the keenest despair. Her lips are steady, but her eyes grow large and wild. It is all so difficult to realise. Is it true—*true*? A sharp sigh breaks from her. Is *everything* to go from her—name, hope, honour, and now—her lover?

'I have spoken to Richard,' continues Lady Bouverie, in her usual chilling tone—like all mean natures, she has acquired strength from the sight of another's weakness. 'But he only



gave me to understand that he could do nothing ! As an honourable man, he persists in considering himself bound to you still. He cannot, of course, be the *first* to speak of dissolving the tie that connects you with him, however willing he may be to be released.'

'He is not willing,' says the girl, interrupting her quietly—'that I *know*. I entreat you not to wrong him. Let me help you, madam, to a more honest solution of your trouble ; you wish *me* to be the one to break all ties between us, as he will not. Is not that so ? You dread a marriage that must necessarily drag him down to the sad, *sad* level of the woman he loves. No words can describe the despair of her calm voice as she says this. 'Disgrace is part of me ; you fear his sharing it. *I too* would prevent it. You love him no doubt, he is—your son. I too love him ; he is—*my all* !'

At this a low cry breaks from Miss Maturin ; and she turns in a breathless fashion to Lady Bouverie ; surely she will have mercy now.

'Her all !' she repeats, passionately ; but Dolores by a glance hushes her once more into silence.

'Not a word, auntie,' she says, gently. 'This matter must now be arranged between me and Lady Bouverie finally—and to my hurt.'

'You mean ?' questions Lady Bouverie, eagerly, bending forward ; common decency is forgotten in the desire to know of her son's emancipation.

'That I shall never marry—your son,' says the poor child, bravely.

'I have your word ?' asks Lady Bouverie, pressing the matter to its final tension.

'Would you have me *swear* ?' cries Dolores, turning upon her with a miserable vehemence. 'Hear me, then ! He is dearer to me than to you ; yet I swear to you he shall be nothing to me any more—nothing, for ever.' Her head droops. Her hands, clasped before her, are tightly clenched.

'This is an oath,' says Lady Bouverie, regarding her fixedly, 'and oaths are sacred.'

'You fear my strength,' exclaims Dolores, once more lifting her head. 'Fear your own rather, for mine is greater than yours. For his sake, I give up hope and love, and all that makes life precious—for his sake'—her voice sinks to a whisper—'I cast myself willingly adrift !'

A sob bursts from her overwrought heart, and she flings out her arms, as though in renunciation of happiness.

‘To-day you feel like this ; but to-morrow——’

Lady Bouverie pauses. She has altogether failed to fathom the intensity of the other’s meaning.

‘To-morrow shall be as to-day,’ returns Dolores, firmly. ‘And now—*will you go ?*’

There is no discourtesy in her tone—only a weariness that makes itself felt. Lady Bouverie, glad of her dismissal—knowing that she bears away with her victory—rises to her feet and rustles towards the door ; but the frou-frou of her silken skirts breaks the spell that has held Miss Maturin.

‘Stay,’ she says, advancing a step or two towards Lady Bouverie, as though she would forcibly detain her—but indeed her voice alone would have stopped her—‘stay, and rejoice in your work ! Look at her—*look !*’ repeats she fiercely, pointing to the stricken girl, who, with pale face but unlowered head, is still gazing at them. ‘See what a wreck you have made !’

And in truth it is a wreck. Even as she speaks, Dolores’ head sinks upon her breast, and a terrible expression, made up of fear and undeserved shame, covers her. Of the happy blithesome child of yesterday, all that is left is the forlorn, despairing girl of to-day.

‘Ay, look and gloat upon her !’ goes on Miss Maturin, smiting her thin hands together. A frenzy of rage and grief lights up her sombre eyes. ‘You have killed her,’ she cries—‘you have slain the best of her ! Oh, where shall recompense be found ?’

She pauses and glances eagerly at the girl who is no longer with them, but lost in the sad imagining of a parting scene—that must be irrevocable—with her lover.

‘Dolores,’ she calls gently, ‘my darling—my little one !’

But no answer comes to her. For once the girl is deaf to her voice—dead to all but her misery. Miss Maturin divines this, and then all her passion blazes forth.

‘Oh, just Heaven,’ cries she, directing a baleful glance at Lady Bouverie, ‘is there no help from *Thee* ? How long—*how long* will it be before Thy vengeance falls upon this woman ? Do not hold Thine hand, I beseech Thee ! Let me live to see Thy justice !’

She seems to have grown gaunter and greyer. Going up to Lady Bouverie, she lays her hand upon her arm, and shakes some sudden fear into that selfish breast.

'You *shall* look at her !' she breathes rather than speaks, turning her unwilling visitor in the direction of Dolores. 'On your death-bed think of this hour, and of how you deliberately ruined one human life ! All my days I have spent in shielding her, in protecting her, in loving her, for *you* at last to destroy ! She was my child, my own—*my very soul* ! Go, woman, before I do you some injury !'

She has her large powerful white hand upon Lady Bouverie's arm still, and again she shakes her. In vain Lady Bouverie seeks to free herself. The grasp only tightens. There is, indeed, a growing light in Miss Maturin's eyes that might be well termed dangerous, and that creates a wild fear in her visitor's craven breast. Silently they gaze upon each other. Lady Bouverie trembles, shrinks—Suddenly a soft broken voice, scarcely audible, reaches Miss Maturin's ears.

'Lallie, come to me !'

Her grasp relaxes. When indeed had she ever been indifferent to that sweet voice ? She turns away from Lady Bouverie, as though almost forgetful of her presence, and, falling upon her knees before Dolores, encircles her with her arms.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

Sweet, if this end be come indeed on us,  
Let us love more.

SWINBURNE.

UPON the sullen day a sullen twilight has fallen. Within the deep recesses of the leafy wood it is now almost dark. Thick shadows lie among the branches. There is no song of birds in all the air to break the unearthly stillness that reigns around.

A sense of storm impending weighs down everything. For one sad mind there vies with this a sense of misery completed, of a sorrow too heavy for assuagement.

Already a sickly moon has climbed the heavens—a dull thing, poor and faint, a tearful Dian, in harmony with the lifeless evening. Pale disks of light lie upon tree and herb ; yet

There is tempest in yon hornèd moon  
And lightning in yon cloud.

To this dim lonely spot in the dark wood Dolores has has-

tened—as might some wounded creature—on that first awful awakening to the fatal truth ! Here she has come to mourn in silence and secrecy over her wrecked life, over the greatest of all losses—hope !

Flinging herself face downwards upon the grassy sward, with her sad arms outstretched and her little delicate fingers clutching convulsively at the long tangles of the rank verdure, as though in a perfect agony of shame and grief, she gives herself up to the bitterest despair.

One intangible watery moonbeam is lying, as though touched by her grief, upon her half-bared arms, another as if in benison upon her forlorn little head ! But life's moons or suns, its warmth, its chills, can be nothing to her again for ever. The vague, wild, simple joy of living is gone from her. There is only the bitterness of death remaining, and desire to escape and cover the face, and hide from all her kind.

Out of the day and night  
A joy has taken flight.

Fresh spring and summer and winter hoar  
Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight  
No more—oh, never more !

Thus all her sorrowful length she lies upon the ground, her little shapely head, wind-tossed and roughened, lowered to the earth, the *pretty* brown head that only yesterday carried itself so sweetly and with such a natural dignity ! Every now and then a moan breaks from her, a shattered prayer, a dry sob of keenest anguish.

'O kind Father—Father of us all—have mercy—have pity ! Must *everything* be given up ? This thing perhaps, sweet Lord ! But yet not *this* ! Oh, leave me something ! Thou, who art all love, leave me my little share of worldly affection ! Surely I need not surrender *all*, name—and fame—and lover, too !'

Is her prayer answered ?

There is a sound of hurrying footsteps on the cool sweet grass, a smothered exclamation. Then two strong arms, mighty with this love she has been imploring, stoop to her, weave themselves round her ; and Bouverie, lifting her bodily from the ground, turns her face to his. Seeing her lying so, all sad and disconsolate, the mournful certainty has been borne in upon him that she is lying thus—because her heart is broken.

As he lifts her her expression changes. She shrinks from him and makes a vain effort to release herself from the loving bondage of his embrace.

'Oh, not *you*,' she cries, in a little panting whisper, 'not you of all people! I had made up my mind that it should never be you again.'

'To comfort you?' asks he, terminating her sentence. 'If you are in trouble, who would there be but me to help you? Your trouble must always be mine, my own sweetheart.'

He tightens his clasp round her; but she, pressing him from her, lays her hands outspread upon his breast, and in her lovely eyes there grows a very agony of protest.

Seeing her so persistent, he gently releases her, and lets her stand back from him a step or two.

'It is useless; it must all end—now,' she says faintly, and again hides her face within her hands.

'Death alone can end some things,' returns he, slowly; 'but Time is more merciful. It can put a finish even to such grief as yours, my own; but, as for our love, neither Time nor Death can put an end to that! It will go with us through life, and to the grave, and thence to the world beyond.'

When lying in passionate pain upon the fresh sward, she had closed her fingers on some tender grasses. Now she turns them listlessly in her cold hand, and gazes at them as one might when considering some question far remote from them.

'She was right,' she says, at last—'your mother I mean. For all the days of your life you must speak to me never again. It was terrible all that she said. She called me—*base-born*. A cruel word!'

She shivers as though with intense cold, and clasps her fingers tightly together.

'Base-born,' she repeats, almost unconsciously. 'Yes—yes, it was a cruel word!'

'Curse her!' cries the young man, with sudden fierce passion, gazing at the pale face before him, the stricken glance, the drooping, hopeless figure.

'Oh, no—no,' entreats she, piteously; 'she is your mother! Even to *mine*, were she alive, I would not so speak; and *mine* —' She pauses abruptly. 'But to the dead there is only forgiveness,' she murmurs, brokenly. And then—'You know all? You have heard?'

'Yes, all! That *you* should have heard it and from such a source is what I shall never forgive. I have told her so.'

'Your mother?'—in a little thrilling whisper.

'The relationship has ceased to exist for me,' returns he, with a curious laugh. 'But, of course, I understand sufficiently

to be able to give you an answer. Yes ; I have told Lady Bouverie that I shall never forgive her conduct to you.'

'I am twice unfortunate,' says Dolores, mournfully. 'Besides my own intolerable load, must I also bear the knowledge that I have created discord between a mother and her son ?'

'Nothing matters,' declares the young man steadily, pressing her fingers to his lips, 'except what personally concerns you. Forget the rest, and be assured that Lady Bouverie can manage excellently without either you or me. My beloved, how you must have suffered !'

His tone has changed. Now there is thrown into it a great wave of the most tender sympathy ; before, it had been hard and somewhat cynical.

'There is no need to talk of that,' says she, with a passionate attempt at calm ; '*do not* talk of it ! There is only one thing now for me to say to you ; I say it—I give you back your troth.'

She turns to him, pale and rigid, and compels herself to meet his eyes.

'You give me what I will not accept—a poor gift !' returns he, as pale as herself. 'Well, what else ?'

'All is over between us,' persists the poor child, sadly, her oval face looking worn and changed in the dull moonlight. 'Oh, do not make things harder to me than they are ! You will give me up ?'

'Never !' answers Bouverie, coldly. 'Let that be perfectly understood between us. Never ! I have your promise to be my wife ; I shall hold you to it till the last day of my life.'

'Then you will leave all the pain, the trouble to me ?' reproachfully. 'Ah, how unkind that is ! Well, *I* give you up at least.'

'That you cannot do,' returns he, quickly. 'What ! do you think I am not stronger than you ?'

He lays his hands lightly on her slender shoulders, as though to prove to her the difference between them.

'Dolores, do you think you could live without me ?' he asks, softly ; and with the knowledge full upon her that she lies beyond redemption in her answer, she murmurs, 'Yes'—her eyes on his.

'Say that again,' commands Bouverie, holding her a little way from him that he may the better mark the changing of her eyes on his. 'Say it *now*.'

'Yes—yes—yes!' cries she, sharply; but the tension is too strong for her. She falls forward upon his breast and bursts into tears.

'Well, *I* couldn't without you, you cruel child!' returns he, caressing her with a careful love; 'and, after all, I don't believe a word of it.' He says this last softly, pressing her little silken head against his heart.

But her despair is too strong to admit of comfort even from the one beloved. Nay, the very sweetness of the comfort offered only seems to add to the poignancy of her grief.

'Oh, that we two were dead!' she cries, her pent-up sobs breaking forth. 'Now—*together*!' There is a sudden trembling of her slight limbs; instinctively she clings to him. To be buried—lost—forgotten—beyond the ken of all humanity is the one wild longing that remains to her. And *with* him! If they might only be permitted to share this everlasting exile—to go together whither no man may follow, past fear and anguish and despair and all desire!

I wish we were dead together to-day,  
Lost sight of, hidden away out of sight,  
Clasped and clothed in the cloven clay,  
Out of the world's way, out of the light,  
Out of the ages of worldly weather,  
Forgotten of all men altogether,  
All the world's first dead taken wholly away,  
Made one with death, filled full of the night!

'There is something as good as death before us,' says Bouverie, steadily—'there is life—a long life of happiness, I hope and believe! Let no false suspicions of evil mar the perfection of it.'

'The perfection! Where can that come in? You—you pretend too much!' exclaims she, with a little burst of irritable passion born of her acute suffering. 'Perfection can never more apply to anything connected with me. I am tainted!'

She lifts her head. 'White like a white rose' is the face to which she compels his regard. But, in spite of all her self-control, her lips quiver. It is no exaggeration to say that the sight of those quivering lips is torture to him.

'I must ask you not to talk like that,' he says, sternly. 'I regard you now—I have regarded you for some time—as nothing less than my wife. I shall not listen to even one derogatory word uttered about her.'

His tone subdues her for the moment; but after a little

mental confusion, the faithful spirit within her fragile body reasserts itself.

'Your wife I shall never be,' she replies, softly, but decisively. There is exquisite pain in her face and voice. Her small fingers interlaced are crushed against each other until a white outline is marked upon her hands. 'Beloved, would I do you such an injury as to let you wed one who—whose birth——'

'Be silent, Dolores,' interrupts the young man, suddenly.

'But indeed,' sobs she, weeping bitterly again, 'I *cannot* be silent. It must be said; and it will be too—if not by you or me, at least, by all the rest of the world. Alas, dear heart, how you yourself recoil from the bare mention of it!'

'You wrong me very much,' protests Bouverie, with deep emotion. 'I silenced you only lest your words should hurt yourself. I hold you so above taint or shame of any kind that I defy the world to find a flaw in you.' He turns to her and encircles her with his arms. 'My stainless lily,' he whispers tenderly, laying his cheek to hers, 'my little queen!'

The moon even in its saddened state has grown older, more brilliant; from over the hills a faint wind is come to them. A rushing rivulet is at play, somewhere in the leafy distance. The whole world around seems peaceful, save only these two hearts. The coming storm is still so adolescent as to be unimportant. It may, and it may not be, it is unsure; but the sure misery of the two standing beneath the trees is cruelly apparent. The moon is calmly crushing the twilight into night, yet still day lingers; most grievous day, better hurried into forgetfulness, but still alive.

'Love, will you listen to me?' asks Dolores, softly, holding out her two cold hands to Bouverie. 'I beseech you to listen. It is my irrevocable decision that we must part; so hear me. It is my own decision.'

'And you are mine. Your decision is therefore only partly your own. I have a share in it. And—— No; I will not listen to it.'

'Your mother has my promise,' says the girl, with a sad little smile. 'I gave it to her willingly, for your sake.'

'My mother!'

'Yes. She—she was not altogether ungentle with me. I owe her something for that; but—— Nay, never mind the "but,"' she breaks out impatiently. 'She was right in all that



she said. We might both have repented afterwards when it was too late.'

'Speak for yourself. I should not.'

'Do not let us go into it,' she interrupts him gently. 'It cannot be altered now. Be merciful to me, Dick, and accept this decision of mine.'

'Are you merciful to me?'

'I am--I am indeed!' declares she, pitifully. 'Ah, believe it!--I would go farther still if I could, and bear all the pain of parting; but I know'--gazing at him with a wistful tenderness--'that that is denied me,--you too must endure!'

'That is nothing,' says Bouverie. 'Forget that; it is my business to see that you do not carry out your mad scheme. It seems a simple thing to you to abandon me; but how if I will not be abandoned?'

'Your strength is insufficient,' murmurs the girl, solemnly. 'Great power belongeth but to God, and He has ordained all this. You must submit.'

There is a nobility in her look which silences him for the moment. An exquisite flush lights up her face, and her fingers, lifted to her breast, lie there convulsively, as though to stay the throbbing of the heart beneath.

'Must I?' asks Bouverie, unsteadily.

She mistakes these words for a yielding on his part, and the flush dies upon her cheek and her pale lips grow paler.

'At last you understand,' she says, lifting her blanched face and sorrowful eyes to his. 'At last! Yes; it must be so.' Then all at once her calmness quite forsakes her; she lies like a broken lily in his arms. 'Oh, love, oh, *love!*' she murmurs faintly, clinging to him as though she feels the final parting is indeed at hand.

He returns her embrace only in part, his mind being gone to other matters.

'You speak lightly of our ended love,' he says coldly. 'But still there is something to be said. Suppose some happy chance should lift this cloud that hangs above you'--in his soul he does not believe that any such blessed uplifting is possible--'suppose it should be so. How then?'

'Ah, then!'

She has caught the inflection he desired. She looks transfigured. He knows now to a certainty that the happiness of her life depends upon the improbable chance he has described to her. Her lips tremble, a great wave of colour sweeps across

her face, lingers a second or so, and then disappears—as harsh sense reasserts itself—only to leave her whiter than before. All is vanity, saith the preacher. Ah! why has Dick suggested to her this most forlorn, because most hopeless of all imaginings?

‘You are cruel,’ she breathes, pathetically.

Where is the use of answering her? Is not the whole thing cruel? His arm still holds her against a heart that is as surely breaking as her own. Night is descending—a sombre threatening night made only more menacing by the dull moon that betrays it. Beyond are the stately pines, and there, ‘where the moonrise breaks the dusky grey,’ are the tremulous beeches, their pale young leaves drooping beneath the warm breathings of the circumambient air.

Placing his hand gently beneath her chin, he lifts her face and gazes silently upon it. What a transformation is here! The pretty lips erstwhile so prone to laughter are now closed, yet eloquent with a silent melancholy. Her drenched eyes, with their tears still lying heavy on the long dark lashes, speak to him in mournful numbers. It is a most grievous thing to see her standing thus, crushed, disconsolate, dishonoured.

‘I have listened to you; now hear *me*,’ he exclaims, suddenly, though without suspicion of haste. ‘All that you have said to me counts just as nothing. We stand to-day as we stood yesterday. You are my affianced wife now as you were then.’

She would have spoken again, but he prevents her.

‘No, not a word,’ he interposes quickly. ‘I will hear no further protest. It is useless. Time will prove to you that my will is stronger than yours. Yet believe me, dearest, it is the one time in our lives in which I shall refuse to defer to you. Come—let me take you home! This trouble has been too much for you.’

‘Yes; I will go home,’ acquiesces the girl, monotonously.

‘You will let me see you again this evening; I must come up to Greylands to speak to your aunt. It will be better that we should see each other again.’ There is anxiety in his tone.

‘Whatever happens, however it may be, you will be kind to auntie,’ entreats Dolores, laying her hand with a feverish earnestness upon his arm. ‘You will not reproach her? Think—*think* how she has suffered, and all for me! Oh, if you have loved me, think of that!’

'As I *do* love you, I shall think always of what is most pleasing to you,' returns Bouverie, gravely. 'But in truth I should be good to Miss Maturin irrespective of my love for you, if only because of the affection I bear her; and shall I, your lover, not honour her the more for the tenderness she has displayed towards you? But answer me. I shall see you again to-night?'

'Yes'—after a moment's pause. After all, another meeting, another hour of agony is not very much when added to the great whole! And—and it need not affect her resolve in any way. And to see him once again—for the last time! There is a meagre grain of sweetness in the misery of this thought. She might, indeed, bring him something to keep—to remember her by in all the coming years. Death, when courted, is reluctant; and there will probably be *many* years.

'Yes,' she says again, faintly.

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### CHAPTER XXIII.

Alas! for sorrow is all the end of this,  
O sad kissed mouth, how sorrowful it is!

SWINBURNE.

'I TELL you it will kill her,' says Miss Maturin, vehemently.

She is standing in her boudoir, looking pale and gaunt after the day's exhaustion. The little ormolu clock upon the mantel-piece is on the stroke of ten.

'Can I see her?' asks Bouverie, with downcast eyes.

'No, I think not; it will be better to leave her to herself. She knew you were coming this evening, and if she wishes to see you she will come of her own accord, without your sending for her. She looked feverish and thoroughly undone. I hope she has gone to sleep; extreme mental depression often produces unconsciousness.'

'But she promised to see me. She may think it strange my not coming until now—at so late an hour,' explains the young man, nervously; 'but so many things prevented me. There were final matters to be arranged.'

'You have left your home, then, for good?'

'For ever. I shall not return there again; that is decided.'

I wish to say nothing against my mother; but to live beneath her roof again would be an impossibility.'

'She is a devil!' says Miss Maturin, without the faintest trace of excitement, but with a certain cold conviction. 'I am glad you have decided on shaking off her influence.'

'As for the influence, it is hardly worth speaking about; neither is she. Let us talk instead of the one thing who is all the world to us—let us talk of Dolores!'

'There is so much to be said, and yet so little,' exclaims Miss Maturin restlessly, walking to and fro. 'You know all the first part of her wretched story—I need not recount it to you; but there are some later, some minor details that you alone may hear; they are not for the satisfaction of vulgar curiosity. With Dolores's birth my story to Lady Bouverie ended.'

'You made some effort to find her mother?'

'One unceasing effort that filled my life for two long years. At last I found a clue, as you have heard from your mother; a letter came to me. You know of my journey to Brittany, my adoption of my dear girl, and our long wanderings in foreign lands.'

'What I do not know,' Dick returns, 'is your subsequent knowledge of Dolores's father.'

'Ay,' says Miss Maturin, 'he came to me prior to my leaving England for many years with my young charge, and demanded an interview. I refused it. Remorse doubtless stirred within him; but it was remorse that came too late. I could not entertain it. My whole soul revolted from the man. When I looked at my little innocent, lying in my arms speechless, unable to utter a protest for herself, I enlisted myself upon her side and swore I would defend her from him at any risk. I left home abruptly, carrying my child with me. Then there came a letter from him. It was forwarded to me—a mad letter, full of grief; *grief* when *she*—the woman who should have been honoured, but was now, by his wilful act, *dishonoured*—lay mouldering in her shroud! He asked me what of his child. It was evident he had heard of—my sister's death; but of the child he knew nothing, except that I had taken it. I answered him that the child was—dead!'

She ceases abruptly, and, sinking back in her chair, sits for a moment rigid, her hands clasped tightly in her lap.

'Dead as her mother!' she continues; then, slowly, 'That was the message I sent him. Dead as the girl whose death lay at his own door! It was a lie. But what of that? You

think I regret it? No—a thousand times no! After all these years I would do again now as I did then. I would rescue the child at any price from the vile hands of one whose soul was blackened by a crime beyond redemption.’

‘You have never heard of him since?’

‘Never. Dolores knows nothing of him. She believes him dead as her mother; so he is to *her*. Whether he still roams the earth or has gone to meet his just reward in the land beyond the grave, is unknown to me.’

She is silent for a little while; and Bouverie does not care to interrupt her, being lost in an absorption of his own creating. When two minutes, scarcely noticed by either of them, have died into the past, she speaks again.

‘What horrible evil has fallen into our days,’ she says—‘hers and mine, I mean!’

‘And mine,’ adds Bouverie, ‘for *her* sake—though I will not acknowledge that evil will be the end of it.’

‘You are a faithful soul,’ says Miss Maturin, in a low tone; ‘and yet I feel bound to tell you that you are free; you may go; you may drop us honourably into your past; no stigma will attach itself to you, no touch of shame will haunt you for it. Go, whilst there is yet time!’

‘Pshaw!’ returns Dick. ‘What do you take me for? Am I a fool? Am I likely to resign for a paltry reason the best gift that God can bestow? Even if I would, I could not give up Dolores; and, as for all you have said, why, it counts to me as nothing, but only as an incentive to be better to her than even I meant to be!’

Miss Maturin, rising suddenly, turns upon him a gaze illuminated by a very immediate knowledge of his worth.

‘I have done well by her,’ she mutters, softly. She continues to regard him with extreme tenderness for a few minutes; then, as though recollection returns to her of its own accord and without encouragement, she starts and her eyes falter before his. ‘Resistance is useless,’ she says. ‘We are not strong enough to fight the world. And yet submission will be her death! She will die,’ declares Miss Maturin, in a cold, constrained voice. ‘She is not strong, and the pressure will be too much for her.’

‘Not when she hasn’t got to bear it alone,’ answers Dick, quietly. ‘I flatter myself I can endure a good deal of pressure. She shall feel none when I am near. Can I see her to-morrow early?’

'I don't know'—uncertainly ; 'she looked so white, so still, so forlorn, when she bade me good-night that I scarcely know what to think. She feels this thing,' cries Miss Maturin, with a sudden passion of grief, 'more than you or I may know. I tell you it will kill her ! Oh, what forgiveness can be accorded *her* who first destroyed the righteous gladness of her soul !'

'None,' decides Bouverie, sternly.

'There is no help for Dolores,' goes on Miss Maturin, subduing her active grief in part, and yet giving her visitor an even more certain knowledge of her misery in her enforced quiet, than in her outspoken despair. 'She is cast down, lowered to the earth. She is indeed

All bereft,  
As when some tower doth fall,  
With battlements and wall  
And gates and bridge and all,  
And nothing left !

There *is* nothing,' finishes Miss Maturin, who has made her pitiful quotation half unconsciously, as one might who had been thinking of it and dwelling on it—also unconsciously—for many an hour.

'There is me,' corrects Bouverie, not so much assertively as with a sort of eager pathos.

'Ah, yes, there is you !' She sighs heavily. 'Well—you will be true. Let us wait and see what a day may bring forth.'

'I think, if I could see her,' repeats Bouverie, reflectively, his eyes on the ground. 'But, as you say, it is too late, and she may perhaps be sleeping. Well, till to-morrow then.'

He stretches out his hand, and Miss Maturin clasps it eagerly.

'To-morrow,' she echoes faintly.

Leaving the room, he closes the door after him with extreme gentleness ; some other door upon this corridor may hide behind it his little sad love, and to rouse her again to a quick remembrance of her grief would be horrible. In accordance with this train of thought, he treads lightly the polished floor, going with down-bent head and steps as carefully picked as to suggest the idea of sickness somewhere ; and truly sick at heart she must be, sleeping or waking.

Far away in the dim distance a lamp is burning ; it is so

remotely placed as to be almost reflectless in this corridor ; but its feebleness is amply compensated for by the rays of a liquid moon straying through the oriel window that stares day and night upon the east.

Just now

Moonèd Ashtaroth,  
Heaven's queen and mother both,

has reached her highest point of glory. In a cloudless realm she reigns supreme, surrounded by the tremulous stars, which pale and scintillate before her presence, throwing out soft lustres of orange, green and opal. All fear of storm has for the present died away.

Bouverie stands for a moment to gaze upon the eloquent heavens and to drink in some quietude from the silence and calmness of the night. He is fast losing himself in an endless reverie, when a slight sound coming from the extremity of the corridor, rouses him from his dreaming.

Slowly recovering himself, he turns, as though to ascertain the cause of his disturbance. Lifting his hand to his brow to ward off the strong moonlight, he seeks to pierce the darkness beyond. It divides. Something comes from out of it with vague uncertain steps, with a strange lingering. He leans forward. Is it an angel—*her* spirit, or——?

Slowly she comes to him over the shining boards, in her white clinging draperies, with loosened hair and with sad eyes. and cheeks all pale and wan. Oh, sorrowful Dolores ! She lays her hands in his. Diana's brilliant fire lights up her mournful face and tints the darkness of her eyes.

'How long you have been,' she says, gently, calling up a forlorn little smile that only makes more complete the extreme misery of her appearance.

'Long, darling ?'

'Yes : I have been waiting—waiting ! I knew I should see you as you passed by here, and I could not rest until I had spoken to you. I told you—I promised you to meet you again to-night.'

'I remembered ; but I hoped you had given to sleep my rendezvous. I fancied you in your bed an hour ago,' says the young man tenderly.

How fair she looks, how frail—*too* frail to battle with the waves surging beneath her feet ! Her hands are lying passively in his, and now he knows that one of them is closed tightly upon something.

'Oh, no ; I was not sleeping,' she tells him in a subdued voice. 'There were so many things to think of—so many unhappy things'—with a sigh. 'But there was another thing that kept me sleepless too—the desire to see you and give you this?' She glances at her closed hand, which she has withdrawn from his. 'I found it to-day, after you left me ; and I remembered how you had once said it always reminded you of me.' Her lips quiver. She slowly unfolds her fingers, and lets him see a drooping violet, white as herself, lying upon her palm. 'It is an odd time for it to bloom, is it not?' she asks, wistfully, without lifting her eyes—indeed, they are too heavily charged with tears to allow of her showing them.

For a little while they both stand gazing silently upon the violet, which is large and true and sweet as it might be in its usual birth-month, though in reality it is born out of due time.

'It will help to remind you of me,' she murmurs, at last, as though following out some thought known to her alone.

'So it will, though I shan't need anything when you are near,' returns Bouverie, attempting to give a lightness to the situation it does not possess.

'Take it then, and keep it safely,' she whispers, smiling too. 'See—I shall place it here myself, lest you should lose it.'

She runs her slender fingers into one of the pockets of his waistcoat, and taking out a pencil-case, places the violet there instead.

'I have tied it with my hair,' she says—'It and the leaf together. Such a shabby lock, so short?'—she smiles pensively. 'But *keep* it. Keep it!'

She sighs again, and gives a last glance at the sweet flower she has laid out for its approaching death. There is in her face such an amount of unutterable sadness that Bouverie loses his self-command.

'Darling, *darling*,' he exclaims, 'don't look like that. I know of what you are thinking. But does it *really* so much matter? We can go away, if you desire it, beyond reach of cruel tongues and crueller hearts, and make a foreign home for ourselves, and live and die for each other.

'To get away—to escape—that is it,' she breathes, with a sort of panting eagerness. 'Oh, *help* me to it! Give me the strength to go where no one would know—where one might after a while be forgotten by those who once loved——'

She ceases abruptly, and covers her eyes with her hand.



Such a small transparent hand! As the silver moonbeams fall upon it, it seems almost devoid of blood.

Miss Maturin's words a while since—'this will kill her'—recur to Bouverie with an awful clearness. *Will it?* Can this fragile form bear up against the horror of the shame so rudely betrayed to her? Or will she give in—and fade—and droop—

With an anguish more acute than he has ever yet known, he catches the childish hand within his own, and holds it in a grasp that is almost painful.

'Dolores!' cries he, sharply. 'Everything shall be just as you will. Let us go to Italy—to any place that has seemed most pleasant to you. We shall be happy with one another.

'We!' For a while she gazes at him, as if not understanding. Then—'Ah, yes!' she continues, with an effort. 'I had forgotten. Yes.' She seems still dreamily absent from the passing events of the moment.

'Does the knowledge of my changeless love bring no comfort to you?' asks the young man sorrowfully. 'You look so sad! Can I do you *no* good?' There are tears in his eyes. 'One would imagine you had come here to bid me an eternal farewell,' he goes on, after a brief pause, with an effort at careless speech that does him credit.

As he says this a curious change passes over her face. She shrinks from him a little. And then all at once she rouses herself and breaks into a soft low laugh. It is such an utter change from her dejection of a moment since that Bouverie stares at her.

'Farewell?' she repeats, with a mirth that is almost wild. 'Why should you speak of farewell? Is the wish father to the thought? No, no, of course I did not mean *that*. Do not believe it. Our last thoughts—that is, I mean—*every* thought of ours—must be full of tenderness.'

She leans her forehead against him. So standing, her face is hidden.

'I am so tired,' she whispers, presently, in a stifled tone. 'And yet I felt that I must see you again. You were right, you see, when you used to accuse me of capriciousness.' She lifts her head, and, laying her hands upon his arms, bends back from him suddenly and fixes her eyes upon him with a strange persistency.

'I like you in that grey suit,' she says, with a peculiar smile. 'Do you know, whenever I think of you in the future

—and it will be often—*often*—I shall always see you dressed just as you now are, and with the moonlight falling on your face, so. Turn a little more this way—*now*.’

‘What a fantastic fairy! Am I always then to wear but one colour to gratify you? Are evening-clothes to be abjured? And I? How am I to remember you?’

‘Do not remember me,’ she answers, quickly. And then—her face blanching—‘Ah, no, I did not mean that! At times it will do you no harm. Think of me, call me to mind.’—She breaks off incoherently, and lets her hands fall to her sides.

‘Not much harm, at all events,’ says Bouverie, with a careful laugh. ‘But what am I to call to mind? Your wilfulness, your tyranny, the many malignant devices you have invented for my undoing?’ He seeks by his own affected gaiety to rouse her from her sad mood. ‘But why should I promise to think of you at all?’ he goes on tenderly, taking her into his fond arms. ‘I can rejoice in the certainty that the one thing closest to my heart will also be the one thing before my eyes forever. We shall always be together, sweetheart, you and I.’

She makes him no answer; but the small hand pressed against his shoulder tightens its grasp convulsively. There is a long silence. Holding her as he does against his heart, he can feel how hers beats wildly, passionately. But no word or sigh escapes her. What are her thoughts? Of him, or of that most grievous tale that has darkened her young life? There is a sharp frenzy of despair in the clutch of the little hand. He stoops to lay his lips upon it.

At last the violence of the voiceless emotion she has been fighting with dies away, a long, long sigh breaks from her. She lifts her head.

‘Dick,’ she says, very gently. ‘You love me, Dick?’

‘It would be but a poor thing to say better than my life,’ replies he, gravely. ‘Where is there room for doubt, my darling?’

‘If,’ she says softly, with lowered lids and lowered tone—‘if I were ever to disappoint you? How would it be then?’

‘Disappoint me?’

‘Yes, yes’—with just a faint touch of impatience in her sad voice.

Why will he not understand? And yet,—she pales and shrinks back within herself as some thought occurs to her—oh, if he *should* understand!

'I might do something unexpected,' she insists, feverishly—'something which you might disapprove, something——'

'Dolores, what do you mean?' asks he gravely, puzzled by the vehemence of her manner.

'Why, nothing?' says she, with a miserable little laugh. 'It is only that it occurred to me how often one does a thing that—that might not look altogether lovely in the eyes of others. Now if I were to do a thing of that sort—eh?'

'Nothing you could do would alter my love,' the young man assures her, earnestly.

'Not even if I forsook you?' asks she, with a forced smile more sorrowful than any tears.

'Not even then,' declares he, distinctly, perhaps a little coldly. He is feeling puzzled by her manner, and uncertain.

'Oh, but it would—it *shall*!' cries she, with a sudden burst of passion. 'At all events—I hardly know what I say—but at all events, if I ever *should* be the cause of grief to you, tell me it would not be *lasting* grief, that your love for me—tried too severely—would by degrees lessen, decrease, fade away into a kindly remembrance. Ah'—with a quick sob—'it *should* be kindly! Tell me you would, for instance, after a little while, not feel so pained about me in your thoughts as you did before.'

'I cannot follow you,' says Bouverie, slowly. 'I only know that nothing you could ever do would make me love you less. I am yours body and soul. Do not mistake me for an instant. You speak of love's decay, its decrease, which means its death. Oh, darling, my best beloved, what words from you to me!'

He strains her to his heart, and looks down upon her with a face made pale by passionate reproach.

'It is hard of you,' he says.

'It *is* hard,' she answers dreamily. She draws herself away from him and glances at the moon through the illuminated window. 'To-morrow will be fine,' she says presently, in a perfectly calm tone.

'I think so. The night is so undisturbed.' He is wondering at the sudden alterations of her moods, from quick grief, to apparent indifference. 'If so, it will be a great change.'

'Yes; to-morrow will bring a great change,' returns she, absently.

Bouverie's glance grows keener as he turns it upon her.

'You are tired,' he decides immediately. 'I insist on your going to bed at once. You are overwrought. But, before we

part'—tenderly—'tell me I shall not see with you in the morning that little sad brow.'

As he speaks, he smooths with loving fingers the fair soft sunny hair from her forehead.

'I promise,' she answers, in a dull voice, without lifting her eyes, 'you shall not see this sad brow to-morrow.'

'Good night, then, my own. I am cheered by your promise,' returns Bouverie, drawing her to him and pressing his lips to hers. She hardly returns the pressure. He is perhaps a little hurt by her seeming coldness ; but who shall fathom the depth of the anguish she is enduring ? Who shall describe the strength of the constraint she has laid upon herself ? It is all a burden too heavy for her to bear !

A little wounded, he holds her away from him and tries anxiously to read her face ; but she has so lowered her head that scrutiny is impossible to him in the dim sweet light of the moon. Then comes back to him all she has suffered since first this day dawned, and he forgives her, accusing himself the while of a cruel want of sympathy.

'Good-night,' he murmurs, tenderly ; and, with a last embrace, turns to leave her.

Mute and cold, she stands there where they have parted, until he has reached the very farthest end of the corridor. Then all at once the studied quiet of her face breaks up. Is he going—for ever—thus !—for all eternity ? *Not knowing ?* A terrible cry parts her white lips ; she stretches out her arms to him.

'Oh, Dick, come back to me—come back !' she cries desperately. 'Say good-night to me, if only *once* again !'

And then she runs to him and flings herself upon his breast, and twines her gentle arms around his neck, and clings to him, as though she would never let him go.

There is something in the very abandonment of her grief—something so unlike her usual radiant little self—that it frightens Bouverie.

'My soul, what is it ?' he whispers, caressingly ; but she scarcely seems to hear him. She throws back her head and looks at him ; it is a long, earnest look, such as one might direct upon the well-beloved dead ere yet the coffin-lid had closed upon him.

'Good-night, good-bye,' she murmurs, brokenly. 'Oh, darling, *darling*, DARLING !'

## CHAPTER XXIV.

This bitter love is sorrow in all lands.

Some woman fell a-weeping.

SWINBURNE.

SITTING at her window all night long, sleepless, motionless, Dolores watches for the dawn.

A weary vigil ! Slowly, reluctantly it comes at last, with a tremulous sigh, as though sorrowing still for the death of gentle night. And yet it breaks upon the world with a glorious promise. All the passion of yesternight is forgotten, all the storm and rain and hurrying tempest. There is now nothing left but a suggestion of peace to come and a most blessed calm.

The darkness severs, light grows upon the sky ; another day is born only to die.

Dawn skims the sea with flying feet of gold,  
With sudden feet that graze the gradual sea.

With grief and misery within her heart, she had sat and mourned throughout the livelong night ; but though she mourned, she never wavered. Her promise is given to his mother ; it must be kept, if only for his sake alone. He will be true ; but she, for his sake, must be false, and false alone to him in whose keeping lies all her truth and hope and love.

To the opening streaks of crimson light upon the sky's face her eyes cling, wearied as they are from their long unrest. She hears the first soft rush of the scented morn as it touches the sleeping earth and wakens the drowsy flowers in its headlong flight o'er meadow, vale, and hill.

When the tenderer lights have grown into more established dawn, and this again has given place to gaudy day, Dolores bestirs herself. Rising half mechanically from her low seat as though unwillingly compelled to the doing of some act long ago determined upon, she moves about her room and puts together a few trifles in a pretty, fanciful little basket. At the bottom lie—in tissue-paper lovingly folded—a few faded flowers, a miniature, a letter, a necklet golden and fragile, her first gift of jewellery from Miss Maturin. Her first ! Yet it seems only as yesterday when it was clasped round her neck by

fondest fingers. Even now she can hear the kind voice wishing her again 'many happy returns of the day.' Ah, why had she not died then? Why had she lived to see her latest birthday?

All was in preparation since last night. All now is soon arranged. She has not removed the white gown she wore yesterday, but slips over it a light-coloured ulster of thinnest texture, and covers her sunny curls with a small hat that, after all, only succeeds in partially concealing them. But in the poor child's distracted mind there is no room for the thought of concealment.

Taking up her basket, she opens her bed-room door and steps out upon the corridor in the broad still light of the early morning. Miss Maturin's door lies directly opposite to hers. Swiftly she goes to it and lays her hand upon the handle. Then she hesitates. Her lips quiver. *Must* she go without even one silent farewell, one last glance at the dear familiar face that has never shown her anything but the lines of deepest love?

She stifles a passionate sob, and, bending forward, presses her lips lingeringly to one of the oaken panels. It is a last, a final adieu! Yet no tears stand within her miserable eyes as she upraises herself and gives a rapid glance around.

Perhaps there is an involuntary delay in her gaze as it comes to that spot where he and she had stood together last night, and had 'kissed and kissed and parted,' to meet again—ah, never.

She turns away, and, going with gradual steps down the great staircase, crosses the hall, and, as though in a dream, unchains the hall-door and steps out into the thrilling sweetness of the young and growing morn. The mists are rising from the valley and are clambering up the sides of the hill in merry haste. It seems as though they—of all the world—are clamouring for death, calling aloud upon the sun to come forth to them and create their dissolution.

And, as though in speedy answer to their prayer, he comes—slowly, majestically, with a resplendency of glory that lights up mountain and vale. On the instant the heavy mists arise and float in dainty clouds into the far heaven. And then—all at once—the sea lies bare—the opaline sea, that, lying there sun-smitten, trembles and sways beneath the magic touch of fiery Sol.

The paths have grown golden, the hedge-rows, made thick

by growing summer, are sending out far and near their dainty sweets. The birds are giving voice to their first joyous matin—

Sunbeam by sunbeam creeps from line to line,  
Foam by foam quickens on the brightening brine,  
Sail by sail passes, flower by flower gets free.

The day has indeed arisen in perfect beauty.

As one lost in a vague dream, Dolores takes her way through brier-grown lanes and scented wood. Her path lies between dim hedges, with faint suggestions of a wide country lying far beyond, broken by giant ferns and tall dog-roses that top the banks as she walks along. The bushes are full of twittering birds that, waking into life, make the air resound again. The first stiff greyness of an early dawn is dying away, and the land is gaining in colour with every minute that makes the young day older.

Through the country, pale and ghost-like, goes the small solitary figure, with bent head and sad unseeing eyes. The wondrous beauty that surrounds her is lost upon her feverish sight; only when she draws near the little way-side station, and sees the wreaths of smoke that rise from the panting engine, does she at all show any sign of animation.

She lifts her head then, and, increasing her speed, enters the gate, and is soon standing upon the platform. A little nervous tremor passes over her as she moves deliberately forward to take her ticket. The man in the office is well known to her; he will probably recognise her, will perhaps ask a question or two, and, worst of all, may retail an account of her sayings and doings to those she leaves behind. Her trembling increases as she comes nearer to the small opening behind which her innocent enemy may be standing.

But chance favours her. A face quite strange gives her her ticket, and, with a sigh of relief, she takes it up and seeks refuge in one of the carriages. The porter she has successfully avoided; and now, as the train moves and she finds she has really set forth on the journey—the end whereof is unknown to her—she sinks back in her seat and draws a long, long breath of thankfulness.

The train speeds onward. London is her destination. In that great city she hopes to lose herself so effectually that no mightiest effort on the part of aunt or lover may discover her whereabouts.

But London—that universal hiding-place—is very far removed from here—Deadmarsh.

Leaning back against the cushions, she tries to sleep; but no such comfort comes to her. Sleep—ever shy when most besought—flies from her now, leaving her with wide and saddened eyes.

One station is reached and past at last, and now another. There is no one to share with her the monotony of the first-class carriage in which she has seated herself. In spite of the slenderness of her present income, all of which lies to-day in her pretty basket, it had not occurred to her to travel in any lower carriage. Custom has cheated her. To *want* money! that is a lesson as yet to be learned by Dolores.

How fast the train seems to go—and yet what little ground it covers! It is now half-past seven, and still what hours and hours must elapse before London is reached! A sun that is almost tropical is pouring its beams in through the window.

When the fourth station is passed, she grows restless. This isolation is intolerable. It gives too much room for thought. She paces impatiently up and down the empty carriage.

So hot! So dusty! Why, it was cool in comparison with this at— But, no, no, she must not think of Greylands. There shall be no past for her—only a future. Alas, how sweet her future had been to think on only two days ago!

She clasps her hands tightly together. Yes, this monotony is intolerable. She will put an end to it. And then, all at once, she tells herself she can bear the train no longer. What does it matter that she has taken a ticket to London? What indeed does it matter about anything? She will get out at the next station. To walk, to move, no matter where, will be better than this—and she can go somewhere—anywhere!

She is growing somewhat confused. Her mental misery, combined with the last long terrible night of cruel sleeplessness, is now telling upon her delicate organisation. Was it indeed only last night she lay awake waiting for the dawn? Was it only yesterday that Lady Bouverie had spoken to her—or was it a year ago since first she heard that she was—was—

She shrinks back into her seat, and her lips grow deadly white. Oh, no, not *that*! She will not think of that! It is all over now and done. Nothing can undo it. Why torture oneself with memories that only serve to crush and kill the already broken spirit?

She rouses herself, and looks out of the open window upon



the sameness of the green fields as they fly past her aching eyes, clad in their summer verdure. The growing desire to leave this terrible inactivity presses sorely upon her. The compulsory quietude of it becomes an agony at last. Oh, to leave it ! When will the next station be reached ?

She feels no anxiety about quitting the train, and thus finding herself on soil strange to her. She will meet some woman—so ran her unspoiled thoughts—some kind woman—who will befriend her and tell her where to go—and who may perchance offer her employment. Up to this she has found all the world kind, and why should it not be the same now ? No one in all her short sweet life has given her so much as a chilling glance or a cruel word, except—Lady Bouverie. She shivers as though stricken with mortal cold, as she remembers her, and lays her head back wearily against the cushions.

With a slackening of speed the train steams into the station, a little insignificant ‘pick-me-up’ of a place, hardly worthy of notice, but pretty nevertheless because of the gay creepers that cover the grey walls of it, and the red pots containing redder geraniums that stand upon the sills of the waiting-room.

Dolores without any hesitation, steps on to the platform. It is a spot where very few alight, except on certain occasions : and presently the train rushes away again, leaving her behind.

Bewildered, she looks round her. Not a living soul save herself is on the platform. For the first time she feels the hideousness of being alone. Fear seizes upon her. How terrible it is to be in this strange place, not knowing where to turn !

A man advancing towards her, accosts her civilly ; but still possessed by this new fear, she steps back and makes him some little cold indistinct rejoinder, and moves away from him ; then, appalled by the uncertainty that lies before her, and knowing how hopeless a thing it will be to set out upon her adventure without advice of some kind, she turns back to him, and asks timidly where the nearest town may lie.

‘The village is just here,’ he tells her, with a bend of his thumb in the meant direction ; but, seeing that such news is not desired by her, he widens his information. ‘If you mean Dorminster,’ he says, leisurely, alluding to the largest town within the nearest distance to him, ‘it is about five miles from here, and there’s the road to it yonder.’

He points as he speaks to a dusty line that spreads eastward

and travels ever onwards, until far away it looks like a pale ribbon dividing the green fields on either hand.

Thanking him softly, Dolores leaves him, and is soon lost to his sight behind a curve on the dry road.

A long road. Dolores, spent and weary by her night's vigil, toils over it bravely, whilst feeling, without acknowledging it, the fatigue that already is growing too much for her. There had been, besides the sleeplessness, that terrible walk in the morning to catch the train, accompanied by scathing recollections crueller than death.

She had passed upon the road a cottage or two, but had felt no inclination, though by now very footsore and sad at heart, to entreat the hospitality of their inmates. Were ever five miles before so heavy a task to be accomplished? Her feet are aching, through her thin shoes the sharp stones cut; each step grows painful. It is now past noon, and she has had no breakfast; but this last thought does not distress her; she feels no desire for food of any kind, only a longing to go farther, and lose herself in the bustling unconcern of some large town.

But now her strength gives way a little, and, seeing a small ivy-covered cottage on her right hand, a few yards in advance of her, she timidly makes up her mind to draw nigh to it and ask for permission to rest awhile.

Coming to the door of this small oasis in her wilderness, and finding it open, she crosses the threshold, and there stands looking irresolutely to her left.

She can see a kitchen, a blazing fire, and near it some one—who is plainly the goodwife of the house—moving to and fro.

'May I come in?' asks Dolores at last, in her low soft voice.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

Day smiteth day in twain, night sundereth night,  
And on mine eyes the dark sits as the light.

My heart swims heavily;  
There is a feverish famine in my veins.

SWINBURNE.

THE woman turns.

'Just for a little moment,' entreats Dolores, hurriedly, tears in her voice—'I am so tired!'

'Why, surely, yes, miss,' says the woman, regarding her

with intense surprise and a good deal of honest kindness. 'Come in, dear.' She gazes with strong curiosity, oddly mingled with admiration, at the dainty little stranger with the pale, sad face.

'Sit you down,' she continues, heartily, 'and find rest for yourself awhile.'

'Find rest?' repeats Dolores, dreamily. She looks at the woman, absently, as though her thoughts have flown away from her, leaving only her body behind. She sighs heavily.

'Ay, dear, rest!' says the woman gently. 'I think you had better come into the parlour; it is cooler there.'

She takes the girl's languid hand within her own and leads her into a carpeted apartment made gay with crimson moreen curtains, and decorated profusely with the orthodox bead-work and many-tinted sea-shells. This room is evidently the pride of the good woman's existence, and it is with an ill-concealed pleasure she ushers into it her unexpected guest.

Dolores, sinking into a chair, draws a long breath of extreme exhaustion.

'Eh, but you *are* done up!' says her hostess, compassionately. 'Come a long way, perhaps?'

'A long, *long* way!' murmurs Dolores. Were she a Machiavelli in petticoats she could have said nothing more calculated to mislead the mind of her interrogator. To that stalwart dame the five miles more or less the girl has travelled would seem as a mere nothing. 'A long, long way'—and uttered so pathetically—must mean a day's journey at the very least. And a day's journey it has seemed indeed to poor Dolores!

Her face is haggard; already the ravages of excitement and grievous recollections have made their marks upon it. Her eyes, grown delicately large and dark, look out with a singular incongruity from the pallor of their surroundings. Beneath them lie, like shadows, fatigue-lines tinted with palest purple. Something in her whole mournful appearance appeals powerfully to the woman's heart.

She notes the traces of gentle breeding in the girl's air, and marks, when the light ulster opens at the end, where the pretty costly white dress peeps out. She is not insensible either to the soft frills of Mechlin lace that cling to the rounded throat and fall over the slight wrists: the little ten-button gloves are in themselves a revelation.

'If you have run away from home, dear,' she says bluntly,

but with evident kindly intent, glancing reflectively at the blanched cheeks and darkened lids before her, 'why not go back? If they have been angry with you ——'

'No one has been angry,' interrupts Dolores, hurriedly:

'Eh, now?' says the woman, regarding her keenly. 'And yet something tells me you are not altogether as happy as you might be.'

'Ah, that is true indeed!' cries Dolores, with a sudden passionate agreement, covering her face with her hands. 'But I do entreat you,' she murmurs brokenly, 'to ask me no questions.'

'I will not,' promises the woman, hastily. 'Keep your secret, my dear, whatever it be. There's no great harm in it, I warrant. And now what shall I give you? A cup o' milk and some bread and butter? 'Tis handy to me, and I can see you are main tired and badly in want of food.'

'I am not hungry,' declares Dolores, very truthfully.

'Then you ought to be. I'm thinking 'tis a long hour since last you broke bread. What would you say to a beaten egg now with a drop o' brandy in it?' asks this Good Samaritan, with quite an insinuating air. 'My John he do say as how a beaten egg and brandy is the finest cure known for all the woes o' the world. Have it, do'e now, dear.'

'No, no; I will not trouble you,' says Dolores, gently. 'See how good you have been to me already.'

'Tut, my dear. Let me now do something *really* for you,' entreats her hostess, earnestly.

'If you will, then,' returns Dolores, timidly, blushing warmly—'if you *will* be so very kind, let me—bathe my feet; they ache so!' Her voice quivers slightly. 'The road was very hard,' she goes on tremulously, lifting pathetic eyes to the face of her new friend, 'and my shoes, I think, are very thin, though I never found that out until to-day. A little water is all I want. I shall give you no further trouble; I'—eagerly—'I can bathe them myself.'

The very anxiety with which she says this would prove to the dullest observer that such a task will be new to her. Her hostess laughs the idea to scorn.

'Indeed, as if I should let you, miss!' she says. 'You just lie back in that easy-chair and wait until I come to you again.'

She leaves the room on the instant, and presently returns, bearing in both her hands a huge bowl of tepid water. De-

positing this upon the floor, she departs again, only to reappear this time with a small tray on which lie a plate of bread and butter and a tumbler half filled with some opaque compound.

'Now, just to please me, you'll drink this,' she says, coaxingly.

Dolores' eyes fill with tears. She leans towards her hostess.

'Have you a daughter?' she asks, irrelevantly as it seems. But I think her train of thought is followed by the good woman of the house.

'One, miss; but she's away from me most of her time. She's a very likely girl is my Susan, and as good as her looks. She's clever enough, too, and engaged to as decent a young fellow as ever stepped in shoe-leather.'

'She has a lover?' asks Dolores, involuntarily, with a sudden false brightness.

In a moment the deceitful glow fades; the swift painful flush that has dyed her cheeks, now ebbing, leaves her only one degree ghastlier than she was before. Alas for her *own* lover! Where is he now—of what thinking? She checks by a supreme effort the sob that rises in her throat, and tries to listen to the answer to her question.

'A lover indeed!' the mother is saying, with a pardonable pride. She is kneeling before Dolores, and, being in the act of untying her silken shoestring, is blind to the agony in the young face above her. 'Such a deal as he thinks o' my Susan,' she says. 'But fact is, miss, they're too poor to marry until he has a certain sum in hand. He can rent a farm well enough; but he must have money to stock it, you see. So our Susan she said as how she'd go into service a bit and save her wages and that. And he said he'd work himself to skin and bone until the sum was made up. It seems as how *he's* going to serve for his Rachel too, miss, don't it?'

'Is it much? The money, I mean,' asks Dolores. She has recovered herself during the good woman's speech, and now feels sufficiently interested in this honest love-affair to wish to hear somewhat more of it. To her it seems strangely horrible that mere money should be the means of parting two true lovers. Money! What a bagatelle it sounds! What an easily surmountable difficulty it seems when one thinks on the other things—such *cruel* things that no power on earth can overcome!

'Two hundred pounds,' answers her hostess, sadly. 'Eh, but it do sound so big a loomp! I doubt but my Susan will

be many a year older before she is Mrs. Joe!— Easier now, dear—eh?’

She drew off the thin shoes and the silk stockings some time ago, and is now busied in bathing the little white bruised feet with all a mother’s tenderness.

‘The water feels like satin,’ smiles Dolores, gratefully ‘Oh, the relief of it! What a kind, *kind* woman you are! I wish your Susan had that two hundred pounds. Perhaps’—slowly—‘she may some day.’

‘Oh, someday, yes,’ agrees the woman with a gentle cheerfulness. ‘In the mean time she must only work and hope. Hope is a great strengthener. Well, and have you taken that drink of John’s? Ah, that’s good now! And, if you must, as you say, set out again, why, it will do you a world o’ good. And where be you bound for, miss, if’—smiling—‘I be not asking a cross question?’

‘For Dorminster,’ returns Dolores. ‘I must, I think, be near it now, because when I asked the man at the station he said it was only five miles away, and I have been walking for many hours.’

‘Dorminster! Dear heart alive, what has brought you this way?’ exclaims the woman, uplifting her arms in consternation. ‘Why, you be *ten* miles from it now! You must have come the wrong way.’

‘Ten miles!’ repeats Dolores, faintly. ‘How could I have come the wrong way? He pointed it out to me.’

Then all at once she remembered how she had come to a cross where four roads joined, and had not been sure of her turning. Doubtless, in her ignorance, she had then taken the wrong one.

Oh, it is too cruel! But she will not give in. She is yet too near her home. She must go on, on, until all trace of her is lost.

‘Would no other town do you for the night?’ asks the woman, with sagacious concern; she has secretly clung to her first wise belief in the fact of the girl’s having run away from home.

‘Is there one nearer than Dorminster?’ asks Dolores, anxiously.

‘There is Thurston; it is but six miles from this if you take the northern road.’

‘I had better go there, then,’ in a low voice. The thought of the six miles lying before her, to follow on the five miles

lying behind, quite overcomes her. She, who had never been accustomed to hardship of any kind, to be now compelled to trudge along a lonely road—*alone*! She smothers her fear, however, and, with a bravery strange as it is pathetic, looks up at her hostess with a faint smile.

‘Come with me to the door,’ she says, ‘and point out to me the direction in which Thurston lies.’

The woman accompanying her to the threshold, gives her full directions as to her route.

‘But ask as you go along,’ she advises her gravely, ‘that no mistake be made a second time. And, if you grow too tired, my dear, why, come back to me, and you shall have a bed here, though no doubt a rough one.’

Dolores, turning to her suddenly, throws her arms around her neck, and kisses her warmly.

‘Good-bye,’ she whispers softly; ‘I shall never forget you—*never*! And some day I think—I *know*—we shall meet again.’

She loosens her embrace and goes from her quickly. Without so much as one backward glance, she goes up the hot and dusty road.

‘Poor little heart!’ murmurs the woman, watching her as far as the bend in the road that presently must hide her altogether. There is an honest anxiety in her tone. Just at the very last Dolores turns and waves her hand.

‘God grant she come to naught but good!’ says the woman, fervently, returning that last adieu with a strong pang of regretful uneasiness at her heart. ‘But where be her friends—where?’

Another moment and Dolores is out of sight.

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It is seven hours later, and she is still walking along the lonely highway. But not now is her step light and impatient, as it had been in the early morn. It is slow and languid, and as the step of one who has given to despair house-room.

Where is she now? How far advanced towards her journey’s end? Alas, she knows not at this moment where her journey’s end may be. She has lost her way, and is walking mechanically onwards, stupefied in mind and worn out in soul and body.

Not that she had been actually moving all this time. Some hours ago, conquered by a desire for rest, she had turned aside into an adjoining field, and, overpowered by weakness, had

crept under the shelter of a friendly haycock and sunk into a slumber unsatisfying, fretful, and broken by cruel dreamings.

Unrefreshed, she had risen from this but half-unconscious sleep to find the day far spent and noontide merging into night. Twilight darkened the air, and a faint dull mist springing from a watery marsh far down below in the hollow was rendering even more desolate the unutterable melancholy of the dying light. It burdened the very passing breeze, which yet was heavy with an intolerable heat. But on—on! Her early watchword clung to her then, echoing in her ears and urging her to further daring. Springing to her feet, she had stepped out again upon the thirsty road—but indifferently touched by the soft mist—and had looked eagerly around her.

Here too the roads joined. A sense of confusion filled her tired brain. No one was in sight, no help near. Miserable, purposeless, she took the nearest way almost unconsciously, and toiled with heavy footsteps and forlorn hope along the isolated road.

And now how her head aches! How weary are her limbs! She will seek the very next cottage, and, in spite of her horror of being questioned—a horror that has kept her aloof from every house since she quitted the first kind soul who had so well accepted her—will crave from the owners of it a night's shelter.

With stumbling steps and quickened breath and poor sad eyes half blinded by dust and drifting mist, she fights her way onward. She is almost at the end of every hope when at last a small ugly dwelling upon the wayside looms in sight. She hastens towards it fast as her tired feet can carry her. Whilst yet some little way from it, angry voices, rising on the clouded air, come to her. Reaching the rustic gate that guards it from the road, she glances nervously through it and sees, a few yards from where she stands, a large, angry-looking woman.

She is larger than anything in the female line as yet imagined by Dolores. She is standing very upright, with her head thrown well back, and is brandishing in her right hand a huge broom. The other hand is fixed, as if immovably, upon her hip. She is scolding with might and main, and without the faintest intermission, a stolid-looking girl, who gives one the impression of being accustomed to this sort of thing ever since she saw the light, and who is leisurely shaking the dust



from a small strip of carpet as she listens, or is supposed to be listening. There is an indifference about this girl's face and entire bearing that might have made her a study to Dolores at another time. Now she is too filled with fear and nervous anxiety to note aught but the angry woman and the suggestive broomstick. Some little motion on her part makes the woman turn towards her.

'Will you?' begins Dolores, desperately. Then the request for a night's rest dies upon her lips. How could she find rest here? 'May I,' she murmurs faintly, 'have a glass of water? It is so hot. I am so——'

'No! Get you gone!' shrieks the woman furiously, with an oath. 'I have had enough to do with idle hussies lately without sparing time for tramps.'

Dolores, though hardly comprehending the words, shrinks backwards. A cold chill strikes to her heart. She sways a little, as though some unexpected blow has been dealt her, and then, with a fictitious strength born of acute fear, she flies the spot. On, on!

A deadly languor is creeping over her; with a wild energy she battles with it, but all in vain. Her wearied feet almost refuse to move, her hands, hanging limply by her sides, have lost all feeling. This unknown sensation threatens every moment to overpower her, to drag her to the dust. Yet still she creeps onward through the fast deepening twilight, faintly, uncertainly, as one might in a strange dream.

Oh, if Dick could only see his darling now, with her drooping head and pale dejected face and lips full of earth's keenest misery! Her eyes are dull and lowered; for some time she has forgotten to raise them from the ground; her pretty white gown is soiled and draggled. In one dainty shoe a large rent is visible; already the stones hurt the tender foot it holds. From her parted lips comes a sighing sound, weak and low, that might be born of one who is enduring mortal pain—the pain of a broken heart! All this long day she has been haunted by miserable thought. It is the only thing she has had to accompany her upon her weary way.

Night is descending fast: the shadows have caught her. And now at last, when hope is at an end, her vision fails her too. Every nerve quivers, and her sight begins to play her fantastic tricks. A common bush rising between her and the lowering sky sends a horrible fear into her inmost soul. She shudders and comes to a standstill and cowers before it, so large

it seems to rise against the dull horizon, so fantastically shaped it is to her distorted fancy.

She drops back step by step into the darker seclusion of the high mossy bank that guards her side of the road, and stands there trembling. Then all at once, as it were, her vision clears, and this terrible apparition resolves itself into a mild elder-bush, out of which peep two pale dog-roses. Had she mistaken them for the eyes of some resentful monster?

She rouses herself and again presses forward. Her tired feet almost refuse to obey her. Again that curious dimness oppresses her, blotting out the landscape and casting an opaque veil over the nearest objects.

The wonderful courage that has sustained her all through does not desert her now; but it has sunk into a dormant state, heavy of rousing.

'Oh, that I might find some resting place!' she murmurs to herself faintly. 'Only a *little* place to —'

Something has met her with a sudden violence. She staggers back weakly, and puts out her hands with a sensitive haste, as though to ward off the approach of this new enemy. Her hands come in contact with a stone wall.

At this discovery she breaks into an hysterical laugh, and asks herself half humourously (alas! what a miserable humour it is!) why the wall should have chosen to arise from its place and advance upon *her*, of all people,—a foe so unworthy of his strength! This strained mirth of hers is sadder than all tears. Her smile is wan and melancholy. At this moment it occurs to her with a cruel distinctness that she would be glad if she might only *cry*! But such a luxury as tears is denied her.

Once more she continues her way,—this time with her hand against the aggressive wall, as though seeking its support. How weak she has grown! How dependent! Again that terrible growing unconsciousness attacks her, and again she overcomes it; but each victory leaves her weaker than before.

Is she to meet and battle with death,—here on the broad highway, in the very heart of mild and happy summer? It would be more picturesque, she tells herself, with a last return of the old girlish gaiety that was hers—when? How many years ago?

She sighs heavily. The wall coming suddenly to an end, she finds herself before a small gravelled entrance with a small iron gate before it, and a small avenue beyond. At the end of

this avenue a pretty house, ivy-clad, may be seen,—small too, but exquisitely kept, with trailing roses covering it, and the green shoots of an early Virginian creeper just showing themselves, that later on will blossom into vivid hues of orange and crimson, and at the sides a purple jacmana just bursting into flower.

An ideal cottage, kindly, hospitable. Dolores, faint in body and sick at heart and out of all hope, clings trembling to the iron railings of the gate, and longs passionately for the rest and calm that lie beyond it ; but the memory of her last cruel repulse still lives within her, and, in spite of the failing consciousness that bids her stay, she shudders and turns aside.

But nature, the all-powerful,—stronger than pride,—greater than sensibility,—the mother of us all,—now asserts herself. She cries aloud for succour for this sad child of hers. Dolores, obeying her mandate, comes back, and, by a sudden impulse, uplifts the latch of the gate, and goes mechanically down the tiny avenue. As if in a dream she goes, and presently finds herself standing beneath the rose-crowned portico of the house.

The door is open to admit the warm summer breeze. Across the hall a woman is passing leisurely,—a short stout woman of the housekeeper type, with a back generously broad

She neither hears nor sees Dolores. The light steps of the forlorn little wayfarer have not reached her ears. Dolores, laying one hand upon the lintel of the door, lifts the other and holds it out imploringly to the departing figure of the woman. Alas, her back is turned and she cannot see ! Swiftly, swiftly, she goes from her. Another moment, and she will have turned the corner, and Dolores's best chance will be gone.

Tightly clenching her hands, the poor child tries desperately to give utterance to the words burning within her, only to find that she cannot. Something terrible has happened to her ! She cannot speak ! Her voice is dumb—dead ! At the very last moment it has failed her. A prolonged nightmare of horror and misery and fatigue has rendered her mute.

She struggles with her failing powers. An agonised expression convulses her face. Her last hope is escaping her, yet she cannot call aloud to it to stay. She shivers from head to foot. Another instant, and this unknown woman—who yet is human, and may perhaps be her saviour—will have turned the corner

and disappeared. She cannot see the trembling hand outstretched or note the pitifulness of the face. Deliberately—ignorant of the pain that lies behind her—the housekeeper continues her way, humming a simple ditty as she goes.

Dolores, desperate, makes one last violent effort to overcome herself. A cry breaks from her, low and bitter exceedingly; the woman, startled, turns.

‘One moment!’ cries Dolores, hoarsely, holding out to her now both her hands. ‘*One.*’

That strange cloud is again enveloping her; she seems ever falling, falling, and her voice, how strange it sounds! *Is it her own voice?*

‘Help me!’ she whispers faintly.

‘Bless me!’ exclaims the woman, in a frightened tone. She flings aside the feather duster she has been carrying, and rushes towards the girl with arms nervously extended. Another instant, and Dolores has sunk into them, exhausted, insensible.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

My dream and my dread  
Are of her, and for her sake I would  
That my life were fled.

SWINBURNE.

It is a week later; six whole days have grown and shrunk and died before men’s gaze since first that terrible sense of loss unspeakable, that knowledge of desolation, fell with a crushing virulence upon Miss Maturin and Bouverie. She has gone from them—the one they loved—gone for ever! Already their belief in her possible recovery grows languid; hope is almost at an end.

First there had been an incredulous amazement when her room was found vacant, and the hours came and went without bringing a sign from her who filled all their thoughts to overflowing. The little lace-edged bed had not been slept in, that they knew at once; the satin coverlet of palest blue was stretched out calmly, unwrinkled by lightest touch. Her hat and cloak were missing; but all this was as nothing. She had probably passed a sleepless night, torn by distressful thought, and had gone out of the house in the early morning

to clear her sad brain and refresh her tired spirit with the sweet satisfying dew. She would return presently and explain, and be happier doubtless for her slow night's communing, and stronger to bear up beneath this ill that had fallen upon her.

But she did not return ; and when morn had worn into afternoon, and that again had given place to signs of coming night, great fear smote upon Miss Maturin's heart.

'O kind, *kind* Being who ruleth over all, subdue and kill this torturing fear, and grant that her sweet body still holds within it the life we know and prize !'—so she prayed.

Again her room was searched, hoping it might afford some clue to her disappearance ; but even the orthodox few words—always to be found upon the dressing-table of the newly-flown—were absent here, and there was literally nothing to give the mind food for further search. The servants, only a degree less interested than the principals in this sad drama, went about softly on tiptoe, whispering to each other at unfrequented turns in the many corridors, with faces pale and sympathetic.

As night fell upon the terrible day that rose upon Dolores's flight, Miss Maturin grew distracted. But Bouverie—who had not left her all day, except to wander wildly through the woods and such quaint spots as had drawn Dolores towards them in her careless wanderings by stream and lawn—had still professed an almost passionate persistence in his certainty of her return.

But as the dying hours waned and faded, and still no tidings of her reached them, he too became half maddened, and, rushing forth, penetrated far into the dense woodlands, seeking her whom he could not yet believe had finally deserted him.

The morning light saw him at the railway-station ; but the clerk at the ticket-office could tell him nothing. He had been absent yesterday, unavoidably detained by illness, and the young man who had supplied his place was now many miles away, returned to his own post. 'He wasn't *much* of a young man,—no perspicuity, no nothing'—so it ran on.

But Bouverie, like Gallo, cared for none of these things ; he thought only of what was next to be done. Could the young man be telegraphed for ? Certainly. He *was* telegraphed for, but could not come until next day ; so that a whole valuable twenty-four hours was lost.

But when he *did* come he knew something. Yes, he

remembered the young lady perfectly well,—a young lady with a grey ulster and a face as white as death. She was small,—short, *he* called it,—with very fair hair. She seemed quite composed when asking for her ticket, but sad-like. And she——

‘For what place had she taken her ticket?’

‘For London. Oh, yes, there could be no doubt about that. He remembered it as clearly as though she only took it an hour ago. He had wondered a good deal at the time about the fact of a young lady starting for town at such an hour. But she was evidently a swell, and swells are for ever doing something “contrary,” and are not, therefore, to be wondered at at all.’

‘Would he know her again?’

‘Why, surely, yes, unless his eyes played him false!’

Being shown a photograph of Dolores, he at once declared it was ‘herself, and no mistake,’ the young lady in the grey ulster with the sad face! When he had said this, Bouverie had fallen back a bit. She was alive, then! *Alive!* He drew a deep breath and grew even a shade paler. Emotion overcame him. A woman in the same circumstances would have burst into tears. But such poor comfort was denied him. To know even this, however,—that she still lived, although parted from them,—it was a most blessed relief! What horrible thoughts had been his during those past interminable hours he never divulged to any man.

And now his search for Dolores was begun in earnest. Even the vastness and vagueness of the field of labour did not dishearten him. London! That huge reservoir for all sorts and conditions of men! How should he find her there? Day after day passed, and still there was no result.

It is now the seventh day since Dolores’s flight; and, tired and worn both in body and spirit, Bouverie enters the drawing-room at Greylands. He has returned from a fourth unsuccessful search in London, and feels despondency making its prey of him as he sinks heavily into a chair.

‘No news again?’ asks Miss Maturin, rising unconsciously from her seat. There is no expectancy in her voice, only a mute protest against the evilness of her fate.

She looks old and thoroughly broken down. No one but he or she who has undergone it can fully appreciate the absolute horror of inactive suspense, the wearing anxiety, the enforced quietude, the turmoil of flying thoughts linked to the

trembling body so eager for pursuit, yet so cruelly compelled to be inert.

All this Miss Maturin has learned to endure ; but it has told upon her. Whilst Bouverie has been hurrying hither and thither with wild and restless persistency, she has had to sit impatiently at home waiting for what may never come, watching each day fading into night, each night brightening into day, without bringing her any hope. If she too were to quit Greylands and enter on the search, how would the end be ? What if the child should return in her absence, and find no one there to receive or welcome her ?

Detectives have been employed, nay are still and will be ever employed, until such time as hope shall be proved to be without foundation. They have been singularly kind and sympathetic, touched no doubt by the genuine grief of those who have employed them. They have now and then even held out hopes ; 'but London certainly was troublesome. The idea was deep—very deep. No knowing what dodge the party might be up to when the lair was *London*. Eventually no doubt they would come upon her tracks ; but the field was wide. It was an artful thought. Still, there was hope,' *et cætera*. It was poor comfort, and the word 'artful' went to Miss Maturin's soul.

She advances now towards Bouverie, looking jaded and heart-sick. His tale is soon told—a very barren one. No comfort is in it ; of all hope it is poverty-stricken in the extreme.

'I bring you nothing, you see,' he says at last, flinging out his arms with a certain recklessness. 'You should get somebody else to help you. I am evidently out of luck. All my love for her does not bring me one jot nearer to her ;—I begin to despair.'

'Oh, not *that*, Dick !' entreats she, feverishly. 'If *you* do that, what is left to me ?' It is a tacit acknowledgment between them that despair has been *hers* long since. 'In your belief I live. And'—passionately—'there still is hope, there *must* be !'

'Where, then ?' demands he, half irritably,—'in what direction does it lie ? Seven whole days, and neither word nor sign from her ! Can it be that she would wilfully condemn us to the *hell* of misery we are enduring ? If it be proved so, I shall know that the girl I called Dolores never existed.'

'Do not wrong her,' exclaims Miss Maturin, shrinking as if

from a blow. 'Not now, when we know so little. Afterwards'—she pauses, and her hands involuntarily meet and clasp each other—'afterwards,' she says, in a sinking tone, 'you may regret it.'

'I do not wrong, I do not blame her,' exclaims the young man, hastily. 'As you say, we know so little. But for her to live, and let us suffer like this, seems——'

'Ay, *if* she lives,' murmurs Miss Maturin.

The agony in her face is so vivid that it startles him, it angers him too; the more heavily in that her terrible insinuation seems to give life and reality to the haunting dread that has been consuming his own soul all these past dreary days and hours. In the sudden horrible fear that now seizes hold of him, he lets his ungovernable rage against fate turn upon her.

"If," he repeats, with a frowning vehemence that would be abominable if it were not so sadly miserable,—"'if"? Why should there be a doubt thrown upon it? *Of course* she lives! It only wants time to find her,—time and patience,—nothing more.'

'We shall never find her,' says Miss Maturin, a curious monotony in her tone, turning her haggard eyes to his,—'never; she is dead!' She lifts her hand in a somewhat aimless fashion to her forehead, and then lets it fall again. '*Dead!*' she repeats; and then her tone grows sharper. 'Oh, my little one!' she cries aloud, 'my pretty child, my little, gentle, pretty girl!'

'She is *not* dead!' exclaims Bouverie, fiercely. Rising to his feet, as though it is impossible to him longer to sit still, he begins to pace the room with rapid strides. 'How can you let such a thought pass your lips? There is no truth in it. To lose hope—even the last shred of it—is to lose all. Life then would cease to be a possibility. It was absurd, my speaking of despair just now. There shall be no such word for me.' His short-lived courage dies, and his tone changes. 'It is this cruel inaction that is so terrible,' he cries presently. 'I wish I had not left town; but I knew you would be craving to see me. I would I were back again in those full but friendless streets, walking up and down, up and down, as it were, for ever! In the very *moving*, hope seemed to lie. Morning, noon, and night I trod those hot pavements, looking for her and waiting for news from the detectives, until every accursed stone in the neighbourhood seems burnt into my brain!'



Coming to a standstill before the mantelpiece, he leans upon it, and lets his face fall forward upon his arms.

'Dick,' murmurs Miss Maturin, anxiously, unnerved by his sudden break-down. Then all at once her own fortitude forsakes her, and she bursts into tears. It is all so miserable. Is the child senseless or cruel to leave them to suffer thus, untold torments; or is it, as she truly believes, that she has passed beyond the world's ken, its love, its censure, for evermore? Is she now lying quietly within her grave, arms folded upon the marble breast, and sunny hair all dull and fading?

A sharp exclamation breaks from her.

'Oh, Dick! Oh, the sweet smile of her!' she cries out, trembling and paling. 'I see her now before me as she used to be in her little white frock, and with her gentle pensive expression and her loving eyes. No, *no*, *no*; I tell you, were she living, her tender heart would hold her back from inflicting this pain upon us. She would have written. There would have been some kindly word, however vague. But there is nothing. She is dead, I tell you, *dead*!'

'If she were, I should know it,' says Bouverie, coldly, growing however, ghastly pale. 'With my mind fixed so immovably upon her, it is impossible but I should feel some sense of irretrievable loss as her spirit fled from earth to heaven. And I have felt nothing yet but the same cold uniform misery. No; she is hidden away somewhere in that great Babylon of ours, alone, friendless perhaps, but living.'

Then he turns suddenly, and forces himself to meet Miss Maturin's eyes.

'What—what money had she?' asks he, suddenly, compelling the hateful question to come through his white lips. Dear Heaven! to picture her to himself without money in those crowded, garish streets! To what indignities might she not have been subjected! What soiling winds must have rushed past her pure white soul! He sets his teeth hard, and a strong shudder shakes him.

'She could not have had much,' returns Miss Maturin, wretchedly. 'Whenever she wanted money, she asked for it and got it; but she was such a simple child that her wants were few, and, as for her gowns, when she chose them, I paid for them. She hated bills, she used to say; and all indeed she ever wanted a cheque for, was to help some poor soul out of trouble or render glad the hearts of little children. She

had a most sweet and perfect nature ! ' murmurs Miss Maturin, a spasm crossing her face.

' Why do you say " had " ? What perversity it is ! ' cries Bouverie, with a second burst of unreasonable anger. ' I tell you she still lives ; this very moment, as I idle here, there may be news for me.' He glances nervously at his watch. ' I must go,' he exclaims, impatiently, although there is still quite a long hour before the next train can start. ' I may hear news of her ; and, when she is found,'—turning eagerly to Miss Maturin,—' let me impress this upon you, that she must not be chidden. No unkind word, no reproach, however delicately veiled, must be administered to her. Has she not known unhappiness enough ? What are *our* sufferings to hers ?'

' Alas ! ' says Miss Maturin, just looking at him.

' I know what you would say,' he hurries on, feverishly ; ' that my chances of recovering her are small ; yet I still cling to my faith in the belief that if she were—were gone from us, I should know it. She is surely alive in London—somewhere——'

' Is there any greater consolation in *that* thought ? ' asks she, in a low voice, her head sunk upon her breast. ' In the long night-watches my eyes seem ever striving to follow her, and sometimes I see her lying quietly with folded hands within her shroud——'

' Oh, no, no ! ' interrupts he, wildly.

' And sometimes she is wandering weary, footsore, lost, through the dimly-lighted streets. I have seen tears falling from her eyes in these nightly vigils, I have seen her little gentle, gracious figure shrinking from the touch of passers-by, and yet moving ever onwards seeking for rest and peace, one white, pure spot on the dark ground of the picture ; I think I shall go mad ! ' murmurs Miss Maturin, very softly, rising suddenly to her feet and lifting her hands to her head.

' This is no time for madness,' declares Dick, gently drawing down her arms again and regarding her fixedly,—' for work, rather, and untiring energy.'

' The energy is all yours. You do not comprehend what it is to stay here as I do, counting the hours as they pass, and wearing out my heart with gnawing anxiety. Oh, the thought of that gaudy town, with its glare and its false glitter, and my little tender girl wandering through it ! Who was there to pity her, to give her shelter ? The world is hard. When I

think of her'—lifting her worn face to Bouverie—'as I ever do, when first she found herself alone in that cruel town,—when I see the dawning terror on her young face, I tell you I——'

'Don't!' interrupts Bouverie, sharply. 'Are we not already bad enough without such imaginings as those? I cannot endure them. I too have felt maddened when I thought of her alone—*there!*' He draws his breath with difficulty. 'Surely the intolerable anguish we are bearing now is enough?' he says again, more quietly.

'It is not,' cries Miss Maturin, vehemently. 'There is another thing that weighs upon me; I *must* speak of it. If she is dead, why do I live? Am I insensate, heartless, that I can so easily discuss even her probable death with you? Oh,'—smiting her hands together,—'how is it that I still draw breath, whilst she——'

'She lives!' repeats Bouverie, doggedly.

Miss Maturin attempts no more to contradict him; she falls into a profound reverie. Presently, however, she lifts her head and looks at him.

'You are tired?' she says.

'Yes,'—wearily—'deadly tired.'

'Let me get you something,' exclaims she, contrition in her glance; 'and forgive me if my mind, being so cruelly occupied, at times forgets. What shall it be?'

'Brandy then, if anything,' replies he, moodily.

'Oh, no, my dear, not that!' says Miss Maturin, nervously.

'Say something else—anything!'

'Pshaw!' interrupts he, with a short, unmirthful laugh.

'Do you think I shall come to harm of that sort? Nothing could affect me now, nothing—save news of her! However, as you will—some coffee then. I have touched nothing since yesterday.'

'Come and have something to eat, Dick,' entreats Miss Maturin, in a tremulous tone—an almost imploring tone—laying her fingers on his arm.

'I couldn't indeed. It is of no use asking me.'

'Where did you sleep last night?'

'Nowhere,' returns he, briefly.

'And all those other nights? Have you been home?'

'I have no home,' returns Bouverie. 'Do you think I could find rest beneath the roof of the woman who drove her into exile? Even to *see* her would be more than I could

patiently endure. Believe me, we are better apart. There was one night,—I was wandering by the side of Dern Lake, and Mrs. Wemyss was driving by,—she must have seen me from the road, I think—I can't remember now ; it seems all a century ago,' he says, pressing his hand distractedly to his forehead. 'But I know she was very kind. She made me get into her carriage,—she was returning from some dinner somewhere ; I cannot recollect ; but she was wonderfully kind ; and she made me sleep at her house that night. Next morning I went up to town again ; but she comforted me at the time—I can remember that ; and she spoke so tenderly of Dolores. Yes, I remember all that !'

'For the future, Dick, this is your home,' says Miss Maturin, 'if you will take pity on a most unhappy old woman. I have no one to talk to about her, except you. Come to me whenever you can, and consider this house your own.'

'It is the only place I ever think of as home,' answers Dick, brokenly. 'Once, it was *hers* !'

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

Remembering love and all the dead delight,  
And all that time was sweet with for a space.

To have known love, how bitter a thing it is.

SWINBURNE,

THE morning has lengthened into noon. Through the jealously guarded windows the garish sunlight is forcing its way, in spite of blinds and curtains closely drawn.

Two or three rakish little beams are frolicking upon the coverlet of the sick-bed, dancing over the small languid hand, and nestling cosily in the short masses of the sunny hair. They are playing too upon the melancholy lips, but lightly, more delicately, as though in their own frivolous fashion they understand her sorrow and would fain grieve with her.

Now she opens her eyes. These last three weeks, in which she has lain battling with death, have been interminably long. She has fought with the Great Victor as only the young and strong can fight ; and when at last she woke to consciousness, it was to tell the anxious watchers round her that at least there was hope—a faint one. Pale as a little snowdrop she

lay, speechless, exhausted, lifting to them in silent but *eager* inquiry great hollow eyes that only served to render more emaciated the white face that held them. But all that happened quite a week ago.

'Ah, so you are awake,' says now a strong but kindly voice, that seems to come from behind the curtains. A face that suits the voice follows it, and looks with a very interested glance upon the spent and broken little form within the bed.

'Well, you have had a nice long sleep, and'—with a scrutinising glance—'you are better—yes, decidedly better.'

Dolores opens her lips, and turns wistfully towards her. 'No, not a word,' goes on her new friend hurriedly. 'It is forbidden.' Then, seeing the growing anguish on the young face, she relents. 'Well, get your question over as quick as you can,' she says, begrudgingly. 'Rest is the only thing allowed you,—not speech, believe me.'

'You,' murmurs Dolores, feebly, fighting with weak memory —'you came to me across the hall, when——'

'When you sank fainting into my arms,' interrupts Mrs. Edgeworth, quickly. 'Quite so. Goodness knows how you brought yourself to such a state of weakness; but never mind that. When you are stronger you can tell me all about it.'

'How long?' asks Dolores, vaguely. Speech, after all, she finds is difficult to her. She slowly stretches out one hand and feebly insinuates it into that of the housekeeper. Mrs. Edgeworth, in spite of the strongmindedness written upon her broad brow, is not proof against this weak entreaty.

'Since you entered this house in such dismal fashion?' she supplies, cheerily. 'Why, three weeks, I should say, or a day more or less.'

'Three weeks!' repeats Dolores, paling. 'Three?'

'Yes, quite three. But'—noting the misery on the pretty, emaciated face—'never mind that. Soon you will be able to write to your friends and tell them all about it.' She looks keenly at the girl as she says this, curiosity not being unknown to her; but Dolores, with a subdued cry, turns from her and hides away her face amongst the lavender scented sheets.

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Two days later finds her stronger, more able to converse on trying subjects.

'Who is in the house beside you?' she asks Mrs. Edgeworth one morning, detaining her as she receives from the

housekeeper's hand the breakfast to which she now quite begins to look forward.

'The master, Mr. Mildmay, for one,' returns she, with a smile; 'for another, myself; and, for a third, Mary Jane, the kitchen-maid. But she don't count, my dear, as she is of no value whatsoever. And then, if you must have a fourth, why, there is you,' says she, giving the girl a kindly tuck up in her little bed; 'though perhaps you didn't quite know that you belonged to us.'

'Ah,' whispers Dolores, tears starting to her eyes, 'how good you all are to me—a stranger! But—but I am unhappy about one thing. I have not seen Mr. Mildmay—I have not thanked him for all his kindness.'

'Well, you shall some day.'

'You I can never thank enough in words!' looking at her with clear earnest eyes. 'But perhaps in time you will know how grateful I am.'

She leans her head back on the pillow and looks up at the housekeeper wistfully.

'Why, bless you, child, I don't want time to tell me that,' says the good woman, sitting down and cuddling the little hand in true womanish fashion. 'Do you think I am blind? No words could be so eloquent as your pretty eyes. Deary me,' with a quick sigh 'tis many a year since I saw those that were like them! Come now and tell me then. Do you *really* want to see Mr. Mildmay! He has seen *you* often enough, I warrant.'

'Seen *me*?'

'Ay. Couldn't be kept from the room after his first sight fell on you. And well I know the reason, poor gentleman!' She rises from her seat, with another sigh that has nothing to do with Dolores or any one of her generation. 'If you wish to see him, dear, I will tell him so,' she says gently, gazing down absently at the fragile figure in the bed.

'To thank him,' murmurs Dolores, softly.

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In a little while he comes to her. The door is opened with extraordinary slowness, and a tall man, bent somewhat, and of a very elderly aspect, creeps into the room; he advances towards her on tip-toe with the nervous tread of one to whom illness is unknown.

He parts the heavy curtains of the gaunt old four-poster with great care, and looks down upon the pale child resting on

the pillows. Then all at once, as it seems to Dolores, she knows that some at least of her feverish dreams were realities. Not once, but many times, this same worn face had gazed at her during her illness. And now she recollects that ever with the sense of his coming had come, too, a strange certainty of peace.

In those half unconscious hours that had tormented her he had stolen into her room, seeming to her in her miserable incoherency to blend and make one with the motley crew that hedged her in on every side and made havoc of her mind. During those sickly visions he had appeared to bend over her ; a few words had fallen from him. Now those words come back to her again ; some ring clear and thoroughly distinct. Again she seems to be listening to them, although throughout the whole of this last orthodox visit he is singularly silent and *distract*.

'Ha, dear me ! Bless my soul ! Tut, tut, tut !' So the dream-land Mr. Mildmay used to mutter on every occasion when he appeared at her bedside. The rich eloquence of these remarks was never improved upon ; perhaps there was no room for improvement. They were always the same, and filled with a vivid concern that used to bring comfort in some odd fashion to the little languid sufferer. The absurd formula never altered, but it never, too, lost its sweetness for her. Somebody *felt* for her ; in that lay the charm.

Now, as he leans silently over her, she can see him more clearly, can convince herself more positively of his reality. A tall man, bent more by the scourging of fate than by years ; a man certainly more sinned against than sinning, but nevertheless bound in chains of some sort. There is a weakness, a suspicion of nervous irresoluteness, about the lower jaw that strikes one impalpably ; but the clear large eyes are open and full of kindliness. About his whole aspect there is a savour of unworldliness, and the air of one who for many years has withdrawn himself from his fellows and found his sole companions in the voiceless children of nature.

'I hear you are better,' he says at last, breaking through a sudden reverie that had evidently arisen out of sight of her. 'The thought is a great comfort to me. I felt for you ? Yes, yes.'

His tone is awkward. He does not find easily the words he would gladly use.

'Ah, Mr. Mildmay, come here !' entreats Dolores, with some of her old impulsiveness.

She rises upon her elbow and pushes back the cretonne curtains that help to shield her from the glare of the afternoon sun, that she may the better look upon her host with the gentle gratitude that is overflowing her.

'Come here,' she repeats with pretty insistence, 'that I may thank you properly.'

'No, my dear, no. No thanks are necessary,' says Mr. Mildmay, nervously.

Even whilst saying this a curious expression crosses his face, a vague wonder, a painful uncertainty that renders him mute. He had a rather pretty speech to make to her—arranged in the study before he came up—but now it forsakes him, and he stares at her profoundly, no words upon his lips.

'But, yes, indeed,' goes on Dolores, tears rising in her eyes. 'I have been a great, *great* trouble to you. All the gratitude of my life is owing to you—because you have saved that life! It almost belongs to you, doesn't it? At least *I* feel it so,' she ends sweetly.

'Tut, tut; you must not speak like that! But get well, get strong. *That* will show gratitude,' says Mr. Mildmay, knocking his eye-glass against his forefinger in a desultory fashion. Indeed, his words are desultory too. He glances at her furtively.

Again the strange reflective look covers his face. It seems as though he is struggling with some force that would keep back from him a memory lying hidden in the troubled past. It is a memory of some one whom she, Dolores, resembles?

The odd part of it is that he too to her seems familiar. Is the transmigration theory true? And have they perchance hob-nobbed in some earlier existence? This thought brings a smile to her pale lips.

Certainly there is some little indefinable expression about him that reminds her of some one. She puzzles over it. Is it that sensitive movement of the lips, or that idle contraction of the eye-brows? Beyond doubt he is like some one she knows—but *who*? That is it. The torment of not being able to 'place' her discovery irritates her foolishly, as she lies there weak and powerless.

Then some sounds strike on her dulled senses, and she knows that Mr. Mildmay has been talking to her for some time.

'You have been a good child, very good,' he is saying. 'So



Mrs. Edgeworth tells me. Excellent woman—eh? But she says, too, you are not to talk.'

'Ah, but I must talk—to *you*!' declares Dolores, holding out to him an imploring hand. 'You are my preserver. May I not tell you how——'

'No, no; tell me nothing,' interrupts he, hurriedly, 'except that you are on the highroad to recovery.'

'Yes, I shall recover,' says Dolores, brightly. 'I feel quite equal to getting up already, I am young, you see, and so strong.'

It is almost laughable to hear her say this—such a little frail waxen lily as she looks, smiling up at him out of her downy pillows.

But Mr. Mildmay fails to see the joke. An expression of intense sadness makes itself discernible upon his mobile lips and sensitive brows.

'Ay, youth is ever strong,' he says; 'yet there have been sad, sad exceptions.'

Again his voice grows dreamy, again that strange concentrated gaze fastens itself upon the fragile invalid. Beneath it she grows nervous. Is this kindly old man eccentric, or—or insane? An irrepressible pang of fear possesses her for an instant, and then dies away, never to return. Surely there is no insanity in the gentleness of the glance directed at her, or in the almost womanish sweetness of the benevolent smile.

'And now I must leave you, child,' he says presently, rousing himself from his abstraction, 'unless I would undergo a scolding at the hands of Mrs. Edgeworth. Get well—get strong, and then you shall tell me the story of how it was you were driven hither.'

Dolores shrinks from him. A great terror grows within her eyes. The delicate hand lying upon the coverlet begins to tremble convulsively. Is he asking her to deliver up her secret? Now—*now*, when she has endured so far and so heavily? Would he have her undo all her work in one swift moment, and cast the agonies of many hours—that have been longer than the longest years—to the winds? Oh, no, not that! To be again the cause of shame and misery to those two, to whose happiness—when weighed in the balance of her soul's reckoning—her own happiness is as naught! It must not be, even though by her refusal to speak, the sum of her sorrows be increased a thousand-fold by the thought that gross ingratitude will be imputed to her.

Mr. Mildmay, noticing the instant change in her expressive

face, is shocked by it, and by the knowledge it betrays to him. Poor child! Does she imagine he would heap another grief upon her already overburdened heart?

‘Do not mistake me,’ he exclaims, hurriedly. ‘Whatever you wish to keep sacred to yourself shall so be kept. I seek to know nothing but what you desire to tell. All I would hear is how I can serve you.’

He pauses abruptly. He is evidently greatly distressed by her want of confidence in him, and very anxious that she should know how good a friend he means to be to her.

‘Ah, sir!’ says Dolores.

No words come to her save these, though she would gladly have made larger acknowledgment of his goodness; but in her gentle eyes there lies a world of thankfulness. Her hand has ceased to tremble, and, though her sensitive lips still quiver sorrowfully, her whole face is expressive of the very keenest gratitude.

‘Tell Mrs. Edgeworth how it is with you as far as you can,’ advises her new friend, gently, ‘and how we can help you, and be guided by her, my dear, where it is possible to you, because she is a good and kind woman, and the advice of such a one is always of the extremest value.’

‘I will obey you as far as I dare. I would that I could tell you all,’ says Dolores, with emotion. ‘But—my secret is not all mine; it involves the happiness of others. The telling of it might destroy *their* peace. Do not think me ungrateful if I withhold much from you; but—it is all so cruel!’ she breaks out, miserably, clasping her hands. ‘Even the consolation of speech—of sympathy is denied me! I want to tell you everything, but I cannot! I have suffered terribly—oh, *how* I have suffered!—but I must be firm to the end.’

Her low voice is choked with grief. Mr. Mildmay draws nearer to her. Since first he saw her, lying insensible, his determination to keep and comfort her had been a strong one; now, he tells himself, no earthly consideration shall turn him from that first hastily but honourably formed resolve; but some ground to commence on must be formed.

‘Have you a father—a brother?’ he asks, delicately. Even to himself he cannot explain the almost passionate interest he feels in the history of this little outcast whom the world has flung upon his hands. The waves of life have stranded her upon his threshold; shall he not therefore succour her?

‘My mother is dead; I do not know if I have a father,’

replies she sadly. It is to her an intense comfort to be able to answer him so far. To have a refusal for ever on her lips for this kind friend would be specially painful.

'You have a guardian?' he goes on, still very gently, asking his question in a tone meant to assure her that he will not be offended should she decline to answer.

'Yes,' returns Dolores, lingeringly, thinking of that tender gracious woman at home whose love had created the sunshine of her life since first her eyes opened on the world and she knew the difference between night and day. God grant!—that now she deems her dead!

'Has he been kind to you? Do you love him?'

'It is a woman,' says Dolores, simply, 'and I do love her, with all my heart!'

'Why, that is well,' exclaims the old man, cheerfully. 'Love is a great brightener of life's troubles. And now, tell me—if love be in your heart for her, it must be there for others also—I would fain see hope for you in the future—and there are other friends, are there not? You love some one else besides your guardian?'

He stops abruptly, startled by the sudden change in the girl's face. All at once, in a flash as it were, there comes to her a strange, a most vivid vision of Dick, as he stood before her in the moonlit corridor on that last memorable occasion when their parting was so nigh—that last sad interview which he had so little known to be their last. Again his eyes, so full of love and hope, gaze fondly into hers; again her hands grow warm within his grasp; and once—*once* more her heart throbs wildly against his!

The blood recedes from her brow, her heart grows chill: but the vision still is there. Smiling, as though in the flesh, Bouverie stands before her, tall and eager, with the old glad light within his eyes—now—*now*, when she is lying here so far from him, weak and lonely.

She tries desperately to conquer the illusion; but her strength is insufficient for her. The room in which she lies—Mr. Mildmay—*all*—fade from her, and again she is walking up that pale corridor with her true love awaiting her in the light of the moon's rays. He is clad in that grey suit which she had told him then would be for ever allied to her memory of him in the future. How lightly at that last moment he had treated those words of hers; but now—does he remember them now?

He had laughed, she recollects, but had made no excuse for appearing before her at that late hour in morning-dress. But she had understood it all; she knew that his love for her had prevented his re-entering his mother's doors that day. He had not dined beneath her roof. He had taken it in very bad part, the cruel telling of the cruel truth to his best beloved!

Yes, yes, she was his 'best beloved.' Be life from this day forth the worst thing possible, she has at least the blessed certainty that once she was to him the dearest thing on earth. He loved her—and she loved him;—ay, will *ever* love him, even to the sacrificing for him all hope, and peace, and joy. Oh, darling, *darling*!

A little heart-broken cry bursts from her, and with the sound of her voice comes the dissolution of her sad vision. Bouverie fades away from her, her mad dream dies. She is no longer with her lover, but only lying here, faint, ill, despairing, crushed in soul and body, lowered to the very verge of the grave—but alas, alas, *not* dying!

She lifts her eyes to Mr. Mildmay.

'Yes it is true,' she stammers, with a painful effort, 'there is—another—whom I love!' And then all suddenly she breaks into bitter weeping, and turns her face to the wall.

Tears rise in the eyes of Mr. Mildmay. He lays his hand tenderly upon her shoulder.

'Poor child, poor child! And is it so?' he says. 'But take comfort. There may be hope somewhere. That his love and yours are mutual I feel convinced. And perhaps, whatever difficulties be in the way *now*—in time you will be again united.'

'No,' returns Dolores, with a passionate shudder, 'not now—or in the future—or *ever*!'

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## CHAPTER XXVIII

No man may ease him of his grief.

So we make moan for the old sweet days.

SWINBURNE.

'So like, so like—the resemblance is terrible!' mutters Mr. Mildmay, as he paces up and down his study in a nervous abstraction. His hands are clasped behind his back, his head

bowed. The belief that he is alone is gently broken *in* upon.

'Yes, she is strangely like,' says Mrs. Edgeworth, thoughtfully.

He starts and rouses himself from his reverie.

'Ah, you here, Edgeworth,' exclaims he, with a sigh. 'I imagined myself as alone in body as I ever am in spirit. And so you too have noticed this marvellous likeness?'

'Ay, sir. Who, having once seen *her* face, could fail to have noticed a resemblance to it? There are the same eyes, the same lips, and the hair has got the same little touch of gold in it, though *hers* would reach down far below her waist in its straight sweet folds. You will remember it?'

'What smallest thing do I forget?' He runs his hand across his forehead and draws his breath heavily. Evidently memory contains no charms for him. 'How is our invalid to-day?' he asks, abruptly. 'I thought when last I saw her she looked flushed—excited—eh?'

'She was thinking of her old life, perhaps. The remembrance of it worries her at times, I can see; yet she won't speak of it. She holds her secret fast, whatever it may be—so fast that one might well wonder at the power that lies in that slight little frame of hers. But that there should be anything *wrong* connected with such an innocent as that lamb up-stairs—no, never!' cries Mrs. Edgeworth, with startling vehemence. 'I won't believe it.'

'Wrong, *wrong*!' repeats her master, obtusely. The meaning of her words fails to come home to him. He sinks into a chair. 'Wrong!' he says again; and then all at once he comprehends and knows that his worthy housekeeper is defending the character of the poor child above. This defence somehow rouses within him great wrath.

'It is only a wicked mind,' he declares, with much agitation, 'that could connect even the *idea* of wickedness with a face such as hers.'

'And indeed that is my own thought too, sir,' says the housekeeper, gently. 'But we must needs think, for all that, if only for her own sake, poor young lady. That she has fled from her home is certain. But *why* she fled is not so clear. Belike, they had tried to force her into a marriage with one whom she could not love.' Mrs. Edgeworth, who is well up in the 'penny dreadfuls,' says this feelingly. 'I have heard of

such things myself,' she concludes, with dignity, and a good deal of sentimentality.

'It may be—it may be so indeed, poor child !' mutters Mr. Mildmay, sorrowfully, thinking of that great outburst of grief on Dolores's part a few days ago, when he had but lightly touched upon the subject of love generally. What, if, loving one man, she had been coerced and driven towards marriage with another, until only flight seemed possible to her as a means of escape.

'Her spirits are dreadful low,' continues Mrs. Edgeworth, tapping the table with her forefinger—'dreadful ! I can't abear to see her like that. 'Tis true we know nothing of her ; but still my heart goes out to her because of that strange look of hers, and because too it is a lonely place, sir, and a young lady—*anything* young makes such life in the house.'

She glances furtively at her master, as though to see what he thinks of her last words ; then in a low tone—

'When she leaves us, we shall learn her loss !'

He has seemed so silent, so unsympathetic up to this that she is losing heart, and a strong affection for the lonely child whom fate has flung to her, has grown up within her breast.

'Leaves us ! That shall never be. She told me she had now no home. Why should she go ?' asks Mr. Mildmay, waking into more eager life than she has seen in him for years—never indeed since that far-off sad event that had left unto him his house desolate.

'Her mind is made up to it, then,' she says, grimly. 'Only an hour ago she was discussing with me the chance of getting her living in some large town.'

'Her living ! Her death rather !' exclaims Mr. Mildmay, strangely agitated. 'She cannot go—she shall not. What ! Expose one so young, so gentle, to the temptations, the miseries of poverty ! It shall not be, I tell you,' insists he, turning upon his faithful servant as though she too is in league against him. 'The world is a horrible place ; she is not fit to battle with it.'

'I said all that to her,' returns Mrs. Edgeworth, earnestly. 'As far as I might, without having the word from your own lips, I told her there was no great hurry about her leaving this house ; that you would make her gladly welcome ; yet go, she says, she will !'

'She is a wayward child,' exclaims her master, impatiently ; 'she must be reasoned with. A little girl of her age should

have no determinations ; one commanding word from her *elders* should be sufficient to reduce her to obedience.'

It is impossible to describe the utter absurdity of this remark as coming from Mr. Mildmay's lips. The boldness of his attempt to look stern strikes even the housekeeper, as she looks upon his gentle yielding face and his nervous trembling fingers.

'I think with you, sir—I quite think so,' she answers, demurely, tapping the table again with her bony knuckles. 'But who is to say the commanding word? Will you?'

'I? Oh, no—oh, bless me! no! It will come much better from you—a woman,' declares he, falteringly.

'I *have* spoken, sir, and failed.'

'Well, if I *must* exercise my authority, I will,' declares Mr. Mildmay, in a rather quaking tone. 'Tut—tut! Surely she owes me something? I am her guardian, in a fashion, appointed by Fate herself. I shall therefore forbid her—not *too* sternly, you understand, Edgeworth—I have read that tyranny always defeats its own purposes—but I shall certainly give her firmly to know that she shall not leave my house unless it be to return to her friends and equals.'

'You will know what to say to her, sir,' says Mrs. Edgeworth, admiringly, who really, after all these years, half believes in him. 'And when will you speak to her, sir—now?'

'Now? My good Edgeworth! Surely there is no such great haste?'

'I think the sooner the better, sir. She seems quite bent on leaving us, with as little delay as possible.'

'But why? She has been very content here, apparently, for three weeks—nearly four. Why—why,' says Mr. Mildmay, looking at his housekeeper and speaking in a low confidential tone, as if half afraid of the step he is about to take—'why should she not stay—*always*?'

'Ah, why not indeed——'

'We can keep her.'

'If she will be kept. Go to her, sir—go to her! She will listen to you, I hope, I believe. Already her young heart has warmed to you, as though you were her own father.'

'Ah, Edgeworth,' says the old man, regarding her mournfully, 'had Heaven been merciful, just such a one as she might have had her home within my heart to-day!'

'Perhaps now, even late as it is, Heaven has sent you a substitute in that pretty child up-stairs,' replies Mrs. Edge-

worth, tearfully. 'Ah, dear sir, go to her, and persuade her to remain. It will be terrible if she leaves us now.'

Here the good woman throws her apron over her head and breaks into loud and healthy sobs.

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Sitting in Dolores's room—the pretty morning-room that has now been allotted to her since the doctor gave her permission to move from one chamber to another—Mr. Mildmay seeks vainly for a successful method of commencing his mission. The 'word of command' is still far from him; the stern power that is to reduce her to obedience is deplorably wanting. If the truth be told, the haughty guardian 'appointed by Fate' is in a low and depressed state of mind.

For quite three minutes he has been absolutely silent. A weak endeavour to produce a speech that will at least introduce his subject is rendering him dumb. Dolores's soft low voice, breaking in upon his distressing reverie, is welcomed by him as a blessed relief.

'There is one thing that torments me,' says the girl, almost solemnly, 'it is that I am afraid you do not think I understand how good you have been to me.'

'Good? Tut—tut! Nothing of the sort,' returns he, in his nervous fashion.

He takes off and puts on his spectacles several times after saying this, and, finally rising to his feet, goes over to the window.

'To take in one of whom you knew nothing!—to tend her so lovingly! Through a dream, as it were, it all comes back to me now,' says Dolores. 'I remember little things, tender acts, gentle glances. Ah'—she draws a long breath—'*indeed* I am not ungrateful!' She looks at him with dewy eyes. 'In all the long future that I fear lies before me—you see even this fever has not killed me—I shall bear a lasting memory of you.'

'But, my child, besides this future of which you speak so sadly, you have a past,' puts in Mr. Mildmay, gently; 'and in that past lie friends: you told me the other day of two at least.'

'Yes—two only,' says Dolores, dreamily. All the rest of the world has vanished from her, leaving only the vivid realisation of her lover, and of her who had been to her almost more than a mother.

'And they——' He pauses. 'Forgive me, my dear, if I



nurt you,' he goes on, presently ; 'but they may mistake your silence, they are ignorant of your illness ; they may, perhaps—— Consider, consider, my child,' exclaims he, with a sudden burst of nervous eagerness, 'how unhappy they must be ?'

'Oh, *don't!*' cries the girl vehemently. She buries her face in the cushions, and a wave of passionate terrifying grief sweeps over her. This is the thought that has been rendering her wretched night and day since consciousness returned ; yet she will not undo her work. Three weeks—an eternity when one is in suspense—have gone by since she left her home. But for this luckless illness she would indeed have written some small trembling line, when she was safe from pursuit, to tell them of her being still alive ; but how—how is it with them now ? Do they deem her bad, ungrateful, unloving, or only—*dead?*

Ah ! A sudden spasm seems to contract her heart and draws all the blood from her face. Why, if they believe her dead, there need be no more sorrow, no more shame for them ; they will let all that sink into her supposed grave with her. But to be quite forgotten, to be thrust altogether out of mind, to be perchance in time *supplanted!* A bitter sob breaks from her.

'You are grieving,' says Mr. Mildmay, anxiously ; 'my careless words have brought back sad scenes to your mind ; but, though perhaps those with whom you lived seemed at one time harsh'—that suggestion of Mrs. Edgeworth's about her being forced into a hated alliance is now strong before him—'still they——'

'No, no !' interrupts Dolores, eagerly. By an impulsive gesture she stops him, and turns to him a pallid, a most hopeless face. 'They were not unkind,' she says, with a curious energy ; 'believe that ; there was nothing but love—*always* love !'

She brings her hands together with a touch of uncontrollable agony, and moves so that her face can be no longer seen.

'Yet you left them ?' suggests Mr. Mildmay, with ever-increasing gentleness.

'For their sakes ! Believe that too !' entreats the poor child, in a smothered tone. 'To save them further pain, I left my home. They had endured too much already, yet they would have endured more ; so I left them.'

'You will return ?'

'Never!' quietly. But her soft low tone is so full of a strange heart-broken resolution that her host looks at her keenly. 'I have of my own free will abandoned my people,' she goes on; 'and, now that time has grown into weeks, no doubt they think me dead!' Her voice falters and dies away. 'If so it is well with them,' she whispers, making a last expiring effort at composure.

'That is impossible,' says Mr. Mildmay, taking one of her little pale bloodless hands and stroking it tenderly. 'They must be sad for you; their hearts must be borne down with grief. If you had been *my* daughter, if *I* had lost you, how I should have suffered. I had a little daughter once,' continues he, simply; 'but death bore her from me. So young she was, I had never even seen her! My grief for her—that unknown babe—was great; how much greater, then, must be theirs who have lost you—a child grown, a creature loving and to be loved!'

'It is all over,' returns Dolores, despairingly; 'I cannot go back! As I have told you, of my own doing, I deserted them for *their* good—oh, *do* remember that!—and therefore I have no longer a home.'

Mr. Mildmay makes a slight movement.

'You have,' he says, gravely. 'If you will accept it, *this* can be your home.'

Dolores, pale and bewildered, regards him anxiously.

'Here!' she murmurs.

'Yes; it is a dull place,' says the old man, gently, 'unfit for the young, no doubt; but there is at least peace in it—and rest.'

'Rest!' Mechanically she repeats the word after him, lingering over it as though comfort lies in the very sound of it.

'You will stay?' asks he.

'Ah, if I only might!' exclaims Dolores, a delicate flush dyeing the pale face. 'But what claim have I upon you?'

'I will tell you,' says Mr. Mildmay, gently.

He seats himself beside her, and, again taking her hand in his, regards her long and earnestly.

'You wonder at my sudden-grown affection for you,' he goes on, at last. 'It is natural you should, not knowing the thoughts of long ago that your presence has—not so much revived, for they have never died—but brought out from the secret recesses of my heart into a more open prominence. You

recall to me—you, with your sunny hair and gentle face—another face gentle as yours, that once was—nay, that *always* must be the one fond remembrance of my life !’

He grows silent awhile, as though recollection, if sad, *is* still sweet to him.

‘I loved her,’ he goes on, presently. ‘To all who knew her, indeed, she was inexpressibly dear. The whole of her world bowed in homage before that pure soul. And *you* resemble her. Your eyes are as hers ; such gold,’ touching the girl’s head, ‘was in her hair ; through such lips as yours her sweet breath might have come and gone. Now it is gone for ever !’

All this has been said more in a sort of reverie than as if he had known himself to be holding converse with the young girl who is watching him with shining eyes.

‘Stay with me !’ he says, at last, with a sudden longing that startles her. It is a cry wrung from his heart. ‘I will be a father to you. Why should you seek to brave the world ? You and your secret will be safe here. I am a lonely old man without a hope in my life. Give me one ! Let me help you, comfort you, protect you, do for you all that a father might do. Looking upon you, I seem to see *her* again, rescued as it were from the cruel grave !’

He checks himself, and, stilling the agitation of his voice, appeals to her again in a voice so low that she can barely follow it.

‘You see how I desire your presence,’ he says. ‘Do not disappoint me !’

‘I will stay with you,’ returns Dolores, softly.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

Shall such an one lend love or borrow ?

Shall these be sorry for thy sorrow ?

Shall these give thanks for words or breath ?

Their hate is as their loving kindness ;

The frontlet of their brows is blindness,

The armlet of their arms is death.

SWINBURNE.

‘It is a most disgraceful affair altogether,’ says Mrs. Drummond, in a shocked tone, drawing up her head and shaking it in a manner replete with pious horror.

She, and a good many other of our friends, are assembled together in Mrs. Wemyss's drawing-room on this particular Thursday of hers.

'And to think she should have mixed with us! Why, we positively entertained her!' adds the fair Georgina, in a shrill tone, and with quite a little shiver. 'Oh, if the dear duchess only knew!'

'Why don't you tell her?' asks Audrey Ponsonby, from her seat in the window.

She is very pale, and she clenches her fingers somewhat tightly as she speaks.

'Poor child! What a pity it all is!' murmurs Mrs. Wemyss, sadly.

'Yes—yes, indeed,' says Mrs. Drummond, who has heard only the vanishing sounds of the last words, and who believes Mrs. Wemyss to be on her side. 'Yes quite so. Poor Lady Bouverie indeed! How pitiable she has been taken in! But who could cope with such—such miscreants? Why, she had positively selected that audacious girl for her daughter-in-law, to the exclusion of all others! Good gracious, if such a thing happened to *me*, I should never be able to hold up my head again!'

There is a little touch of spite in these last two remarks.

'Poor thing!' she goes on. 'I'm sure I quite feel for her!'

'I'm sure my mother would be intensely gratified if she could only know that,' says Bruno, gravely.

'And as for that girl—Dolores—to be so young, yet so depraved! Really, the knowledge of her half spoils one's belief in all truth and honesty,' winds up Mrs. Drummond, severely.

'Ah, *do* let us be charitable!' cries little Mrs. Dovedale, clasping her small hands and leaning forward. 'She is indeed, I greatly fear, the very wickedest person we have ever known, and will surely—if she does not mend her ways—go to destruction: but oh, *do* let us be charitable. There is no virtue so grand as charity, is there, Mr. Vyner?' asks she, mildly, turning up to him her large innocently open eyes.

'Not one,' says Vyner. 'You cannot think what a solace it is to me to see you so carefully practising it.'

'Ah, yes, yes; charity is a grand thing,' pipes Sir Chicksy, in a distressed tone, from a distant corner. He had liked Dolores in his own small fashion, and is honestly grieved to hear her thus maligned. 'It clothes the multitude.'

This extremely rare and unique rendering of St. Peter's greatest truth is received by everybody with a silent amazement. By Mr. Vyner indeed it is treated with an undisguised admiration.

'For warm weather it would be admirable—so cheap, so comfortable, so delightfully simple,' he is beginning, with a beaming smile, when he is cut short by Mrs. Drummond.

'Some sins should not be covered,' protests that matron, in a commanding tone, having conquered Sir Chicksy's meaning, 'though I both honour and esteem *you*, my dear Sir Chicksy, for your innocent desire to hide the shortcomings of that most pernicious girl.'

'Pernicious! Oh, come! I say, you know,' murmurs Sir Chicksy, vaguely.

'How energetic one can be even on a warm day, when there is an absent friend to be abused!' says Audrey, lifting her brows superciliously, and addressing herself to Mrs. Dovedale, who happens to be nearest to her. To-day there is full upon her the only half-veiled insolence that has rendered her so unpopular with her gossiping neighbours.

'You see this terrible scandal that has fallen into our midst has naturally excited the public a good deal,' returns Mrs. Dovedale. 'That unhappy girl! How I wish we could wake some morning and find all this miserable story of hers but a troubled dream!'

She sighs—very well indeed—and glances at Audrey in a sorrowful reluctant way, through flickering barely-lifted lashes.

'Do you?' asks Audrey, with an undisguised sneer.

'Yes, dear. So melancholy to think we should have welcomed her among us and shown her every kindness, and entertained her, and, in fact—though unconsciously, be it said to our credit—assisted her designs in every way.'

'Perhaps, after all, she entertained us more than we did her,' says Audrey, whose large dark eyes are now a-fire. 'We partook very freely of her hospitality, so far as I can remember, and made very much of her.'

She stares coldly at Mrs. Dovedale, knowing her never to have asked Dolores—or indeed any one else—inside her doors in her life. 'The dear vicar so objects to frivolity of any sort—even of the most harmless kind,' *et cætera*.

'Ah, perhaps so!' she murmurs now, colouring faintly. 'That idea is even more objectionable than mine. To think

she should have entertained *us*, and that we have been harbouring an adventuress all this time !’

‘That word could never apply to Dolores,’ says Audrey, flushing passionately. ‘To any one so pure, so sweet as she, such an epithet is merely a meaningless insult. You should consider the exact signification of your words before using them.’

‘Yes? Is then the word wrong?’ asks Mrs. Dovedale, with mild interrogation.

‘Is it *not*?’ insists Audrey, paling. ‘Adventuress! Think of it!’

‘I am thinking; and I now see I did not mean it in its widest sense,’ acknowledges Mrs. Dovedale, with a little expostulatory movement of her hands. ‘In that class there are so many grades —’

‘Are there? You seem to know a great deal about “that class,” as you call it—far more than I do!’ interrupts Audrey, contemptuously. ‘Tell us about it.’ By an indescribable gesture she includes Vyner in the ‘us,’ and a pale smile crosses her lips.

Mrs. Dovedale’s eyes flash; but she still manages to maintain her coolness and the little pretty surprised look she has sustained all through.

‘I don’t think I am as clever as you give me credit for,’ she says, sweetly, fixing Audrey with a direct gaze; ‘I merely spoke of her as being one of those who seek to entrap rich young men into a marriage unawares, because of their money and position.’

As if unconsciously, her eyes now turn and fall first upon Sir Chicksy Chaucer, who is nursing his leg in the distance in a sort of deadly stupor, and then upon Mr. Vyner, who is close to her; finally they wander back again to Audrey, where they rest calmly—searchingly. Has her shaft told?

However Audrey may feel, it is at all events unknown to any one save herself; she controls herself perfectly, and returns Mrs. Dovedale’s impertinently concentrated gaze with a careless ease that somewhat puts out that accomplished little gossip.

‘Being ignorant, then, of the story now so unhappily attached to her, and being beyond all doubt heiress to a large fortune, it is quite impossible Miss Lorne should be accused of seeking to entrap any man!’ she replies, slowly.

‘Miss——’ Mrs. Dovedale looks quite at a loss, and

regards Audrey with a puzzled air. Then—as though <sup>a 7/</sup>at once suddenly enlightened—she lets a glance of dawning knowledge spread over her face.

‘Ah, yes, of course,’ she says. ‘Forgive me my stupidity; but, do you know, I have grown so accustomed to think of that poor girl as possessing no name, that—er—positively for the moment I didn’t understand to whom you were alluding. *No Name*—you remember that charming novel by Wilkie Collins that bears that title? Pretty book—eh?’ She has suddenly fallen back into the ordinary light conversational tone, as though already the sad subject in hand has slipped from her, being of no consequence whatsoever.

Audrey turns upon her; angry tears are rendering her large eyes larger.

‘Oh, you *cruel* woman!’ she says in a low tone, full of condensed bitterness; it is so low from emotion as to be almost unhearable, and Mrs. Dovedale very wisely declines to take notice of it.

‘H’m?’ she murmurs, prettily, as if anxious to catch her words, and feigning a convenient deafness. ‘Cruel? Ah, yes, the whole thing is cruel! But’—with seeming nervousness—‘I am afraid I have really hurt you. I had no idea she was such a friend of yours; and—and was it really so very wrong of me’—glancing up at Vyner, who has been an emotionless observer of the scene, with a careful artlessness—‘to speak before Miss Ponsonby of designing women who seek to induce rich young men to marry them?’

‘What a little cat she is!’ says Vyner to himself, regarding her from under his half-opened lids; but he makes her no reply.

‘It hurts me always,’ declares Audrey, calmly, ‘to hear a friend maligned, more especially one so perfect in soul and body as Dolores.’

‘Yes; I felt I had hurt you,’ murmurs little Mrs. Dovedale, mournfully; ‘but really I meant nothing. Whatever I may *think*, I am always most careful to *say* nothing prejudicial; and, after all, the world is full of women such as I have described; is it not, Mr. Vyner?’

She turns to Vyner pathetically, as though imploring his assistance to get her out of an innocent scrape.

Such studied insolence as this is hard to bear, harder to resent. Audrey rises slowly to her feet, and, moving her head slightly, for the first time to-day fixes her eyes on Vyner.

But apparently he does not see her ; his glance is directed to Mrs. Dovedale.

'Is it?' he asks, lightly, in answer to her question. 'I'm sure I don't know. I shouldn't dream of contradicting you, however, as your knowledge of the world seems to be vast. Permit me to compliment you on it ; for myself I am hopelessly ignorant.' He lifts his shoulders deprecatingly, and brushes down his moustache with one hand. He has never once removed his eyes from Mrs. Dovedale's. 'Shall I sink very much in your esteem,' he goes on, pleasantly, 'if I confess to you that a young woman such as you have described so graphically, has never yet come beneath my observation?'

Audrey, as he ceases speaking, moves slowly away to where Mrs. Wemyss is sitting at the farther end of the room. In going, she gives Vyner neither word nor glance.

'Now, that was very good of you,' says Mrs. Dovedale, when she is out of hearing, smiling up confidentially at Vyner.

'Was it? It is an unspeakable joy to me, Mrs. Dovedale, to know I have found favour in your sight ; but—where does my goodness lie?'

'You are modest! But, if I *must* explain—why, it lies then in your defence of——' Her pause is full of eloquence, and conveys to him her real meaning as clearly as though she had spoken.

'Well?' demands he, coldly.

'Of all our sex,' finishes she, prettily, with a coquettish smile. 'You have released us from the imputation of being *intrigantes*!'

'Which *you* were the one to make.'

'Ah, yes, I am indeed too candid,' returns she, with a little sad smile. 'It is one of my faults. What I think and feel to be true that I must say at all risks.'

'An unpleasing propensity,' returns Vyner, slowly. And, straightening himself from his lounging position, he steps past her and crosses the room.

Thus he brings himself into the full storm of the controversy that still rages within.

'And, as to her having run away from home,' Mrs. Drummond is saying excitedly, 'why, the idea is absurd! It is a mere *canard* set floating to deceive the world and to raise sympathy. For my part, I decline to be so easily deceived. She may have run indeed ; but it is with the full knowledge of that arch-conspirator Miss Maturin, who really should be punished



by law for imposing such an acquaintanceship upon us. Beyond doubt she was cognisant of the whole affair, and thought it wiser to get the girl out of the way until the most righteous indignation of the neighbourhood should calm a little. At least, that is *my* opinion,' winds up Mrs. Drummond, with all the air of one who firmly believes that its being *her* opinion settles the matter.

'A wrong opinion,' says Bruno Bouverie, courteously, but distinctly, 'and certainly not mine.'

'You would support her cause?' exclaims Mrs. Drummond, somewhat shrilly. 'She seems to have all the men on her side, at all events.' She makes an attempt at laughter that only betrays to every one the depth of her irritability.

'It reminds me of a novel,' breaks in her daughter, with a little vicious simper: 'the whole thing hangs so well together. Each move fits in so admirably with the others; and the *dénouement* is so satisfactory—so absolutely flawless. First we have the adventuress, then her premeditated crime—then the unexpected enemy who turns up at the right moment, like Colonel Oswald, from nobody knows where, and then at the very last—*exposure*—just when success seemed most certain. It is quite a romance.'

'Dear girl, how clever she is! I have often suggested to her to write for *Temple Bar*, or *Macmillan*, or—er—— But she always says writing is *so* low,' says the 'dear girl's' mother, with an expansive smile. 'Ah, yes, my dear Georgina. But, though your description of it sounds very charming, still we should never forget that there is nothing lovely about vice.'

'Well, I call it a delightful story,' persists the sprightly Georgina, with her unvarying smile. 'Don't you, Mrs. Wemyss?'—turning to her hostess with a gushing gaiety that sits deliciously upon her thirty summers.

'Delightful? Well, hardly. It is a little cruel, is it not? It would be *terrible* if it existed in the realms of reality,' answers Mrs. Wemyss, gently, dropping a lump of sugar into the cup held out to her by Bruno.

'What! You can see cruelty in justice?' asks Mrs. Drummond, turning to her with a curious trembling about her lips that denotes extreme indignation. 'You would shield this impostor? Why where is your morality, my dear Mrs. Wemyss?'

'Just where it always was,' says Mrs. Wemyss, resting her eyes upon her whilst smiling quietly. 'And now, may I be allowed to say one word about this "delightful story"?''

'A thousand, if you will,' declares Mrs. Drummond, effusively.

'Seven will do,' returns Mrs. Wemyss, gently. '*I don't believe one word of it.*'

'Bless me!' exclaims Mrs. Drummond, falling back in her seat and beginning to fan herself vigorously.

'Not one word,' persists Mrs. Wemyss, smiling, but earnest. 'I think you will find that, after all, it is one gigantic mistake—the whole of it. I have no real reason to go upon; but something tells me that anything so sweet as Dolores must have had an irreproachable beginning.'

Audrey, who is close to her, lets her hand slip from the chair by which she is standing to Mrs. Wemyss's shoulder, and presses it gratefully. Mrs. Wemyss, putting up her own hand, acknowledges the gentle pressure by entwining her fingers in those of Audrey. At this moment a united love for the absent girl unites *them* in a lasting bond of good-fellowship.

'You are sanguine,' says Mrs. Drummond, with an unpleasant intonation and an assumption of mirth that is a trifle hysterical.

'She is of those who bear no false witness against their neighbour,' puts in Bruno, gravely.

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## CHAPTER XXX

Kneel down, fair Love, and fill thyself with tears.  
Girdle thyself with sighing for a girth  
Upon the sides of mirth,  
Cover thy lips and eyelids, let thine ears  
Be filled with rumour of people sorrowing.

And I forgot fear and all weary things.

SWINBURNE.

THE days wear on, and still no tidings of the lost girl come to Deadmarsh-by-the-Sea.

To Miss Maturin, wandering idle, purposeless, by lawn and flowered place, this unbearable suspense is a living death. To Bouverie alone can she her sorrows cry aloud; and he is seldom with her now, being ever on the move between Greylands and the noisy world of town, seeking everywhere—and ever vainly—for his soul's desire.

Alone then she treads the perfumed paths, that erstwhile had echoed with her beloved's laughter ; and strolling half unconsciously along those paths, has conjured up a thousand times the sweet words and sweeter smiles and most dainty caresses of her, who was her all in all. Who can describe the unutterable melancholy of such hours as these ?

Two people only has she permitted to enter upon her solitude—Audrey Ponsonby and Mrs. Wemyss. Both had been beloved by *her*.

As for Audrey, her grief, though almost unexpressed, had been excessive. A strange but very real affection for Dolores had grown with her increasing knowledge of the now unhappy girl. Ah, if she could only reinstate her in her former position and lift from her the tongue of calumny ! Her pale and sorrowful face has touched Miss Maturin and opened to her her heart. And day by day Audrey walks up to Greylands to learn if indeed there be any hope for those who so miserably wait for tidings of the lost one. And day by day she learns that hope is nearly dead.

Just now, coming up the valley from her home on her accustomed errand, she finds herself face to face with Bouverie. She is a little startled by the change in him. He has grown fitful and uncertain in temper ; and this, joined with his unceasing grief, has rendered him emaciated in appearance. Time, so fraught for him with evil, has told upon him both in body and mind.

Stopping short, when he would have passed her with a hurried bow, she lays her hand upon his arm. All the old enmity has died away from her, and only an unspeakable pity remains.

‘Stay with me a little while, Dick,’ she says, ever so gently.

‘Ah, it is some time since we met, isn't it ?’ returns he, making a heavy effort to speak with his ordinary composure.

‘Too long a time. There are now so many things I would say to you, but cannot in an interview that must be short. Where are you going ? To the station ?’

‘I hardly go anywhere else now, do I ?’ returns he, with a joyless laugh. ‘I am becoming quite an institution on the platform, a sort of movable advertisement about the excellence of the company's arrangements ; and, for all the good I do’—with a quick sigh—‘I might as well stay at home to eat my heart out.’

‘No. Action is in itself a cure.’

'Oh, as for a *cure*!' says he, turning away. There is something so forlorn in his tone and the little gesture that accompanies it that Audrey's eyes fill with tears.

'Don't go yet, Dick,' she entreats again. 'There is plenty of time to catch the five train if you left this in half an hour to come.'

'Time! Yes. There is always so *much* time now,' exclaims he, querulously; 'and nothing done!' He pushes back the hair from his brow with an impatient movement. 'What is to be the end of it?' he says, with a little quick burst of despair. His face is white, his eyes haggard and bloodshot. He seems as one to whom sleep has long been a stranger.

'A little more and this will mean brain fever,' thinks Audrey to herself, regarding him thoughtfully.

Again she lays her hand upon his arm to rouse him, and presses it slightly.

'Dick,' she murmurs, softly, tremulously. 'I want to say something to you. You may have thought perhaps—at times—that I did not like you. You are your mother's son, you know; but that is nothing to me now, nothing—nothing! I loved *her*—Dolores! I—who never before loved any woman—let all my heart go out to her. After Dad, I think I loved her best. Oh, the sweet little manner of her!' She covers her face with her hands, and a tearless sob escapes her.

'What are you crying about?' demands Bouverie, with sudden roughness, through which a crushing anguish is discernible. 'One would think she was *dead* the way you speak!' He stops short, and a grey pallor spreads itself over cheek and brow. 'What a horrible thought!' he says, faintly. 'Who gave rise to it—you?' He moistens his lips, and struggles to say something more, but speech dies from him.

'If I did,' returns Audrey, 'if I have begun at last to think of that little saint as being in heaven, who shall blame me? Is she not happier there! What home so meet for her? She is dead,' she says, solemnly. 'I feel it. She was too gentle a soul to bear the buffeting of a careless world. Yes'—dreamily—'surely she is dead!'

'Be silent!' exclaims Bouverie, savagely. 'How *dare* you speak so lightly of what means ruin to at least two people;—to Miss Maturin—to me?' He throws up his head hurriedly. 'She is all I have,' he says, slowly. 'All—all!'

'Nay, Dick, do not be angry,' entreats she, sobbing. 'Remember, I loved her too.'

'I remember,' he returns, more quietly. Then he walks away from her, and, as she makes no further effort to stay him, soon disappears behind the low encircling hills.

Walking ever hurriedly onward, scarce knowing where he goes, he comes at last to a large patch of water, deep, yet scarcely wide enough in circumference to be given the title of a lake. Something in the fascinating stillness of its surface attracts him. He stops, and gazes curiously down into the unfathomable blankness of its bosom.

Here, in such a place as this, she might have sought and found her death. A shudder convulses him. She, his pretty love! He stoops over the bank and peers into the motionless waters and fancies how her sweet dead face would look there staring up at him, without knowledge or remembrance of that strange great love that lay between them. Poor sweet dead face! almost—he sees it

Sweet still, but now not red  
Was the shut mouth whereby men lived and died!  
And sweet, but emptied of the blood's blue shade,  
The great curled eyelids that withheld her eyes;  
And sweet, but like spoiled gold,  
The weight of colour in her tresses weighed;  
And sweet, but as a vesture with new dyes,  
The body that was clothed with love of old.

A cry breaks from him. Encircling the suckling oak near him with a trembling arm, he gives himself up to saddest thought. His eyes are riveted upon the swaying water; his brain, unsettled by its lengthened vigils hurries from thought to thought, having for the ground-work of its imaginings only her—only Dolores.

Alas, the little graceful head, with its bright sunny curls, its soft wind-tossed locks, shall he ever again behold it? Never, never! Low in the earth it lies, its glories sullied, its beauties shorn.

'Ah, dear God, why must such things be? I, who have believed, have trusted in Thee, have pity now on me! See, Lord, how in my secret soul when many men of my generation have turned from Thee and reviled Thee, *I* have held firm. I have clung to Thee, found pleasure in Thee;—now—*now* do not Thou forsake me—*now*, in my sorest need. And hear me, Lord! It is but a little thing I crave of Thee, one poor, frail, most sweet life! Oh, have mercy—mercy!'

He lets his tired head fall forward on his arms, and a dry

agonised sob bursts from him that seems to rend soul from body.

Can *nothing* be done? Is money, that great lever, powerless in this case to lift the veil that hides him from her, and betray to him that spot wherein she is? Is this habitable globe so large that one's hiding place is safe, secure? Or is it, as he fears, that death has crept in and borne his darling from earth's woes and joys?

Oh that it were but possible  
For one short hour to see  
The souls we loved, that they might tell us  
What and where they be!

But that it is *not* possible comes home to him with a bitter certainty. A great gulf that may not be crossed lies between the living and the dead. No, there is no hope. She is gone from him for ever. The dreary days must pass him one by one, and still hope may not be his. Desolate winters, joyless summers he will endure; but, as for her——

He flings himself down among the fallen leaves and buries his face out of sight; his overtired spirit has forgotten that time is running on, that trains wait for no man; he thinks only of her, his lost love. A groan breaks from him, a sigh is lifted upon the evening breeze, and borne onward into space——

‘Dolores, Dolores! Oh, my heart’s idol, shall I see thee never again?’

\* \* \* \* \*

‘By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down—we wept when we remembered Zion.’

By this sad lake’s waters Bouverie lingers, dwelling upon the lost joys of his life, until he grows sad as those poor Israelites whose griefs are known to all.

At length a sudden fear, even more painful than those gone before, stirs him into remembrance of the living moment. He springs to his feet. Glancing at his watch, it tells him that he has overstayed his time, and that the compelling of sad thought has drawn him from his allegiance to the passing hour. Already five o’clock has struck within the village-tower. The train for London has started. He is late for his journey to-day.

This knowledge in his present strained state of mind is terrible to him. He has been false to his trust, a laggard at his post—he, who had so sworn to find her be she alive or dead!

And now—even now she may have been found; may be awaiting him. A curious certainty that at last—just when he has proved himself apparently cold in his search—she has been discovered, takes full possession of him. To get to town by any means is his first thought; but action, he soon discovers, is beyond him. To charter a special train would not be possible in this small place—to drive to town more impossible still, with any hope of getting there in time; there is, therefore, nothing for it but to wait for the night-mail. But how to bear the suspense to be endured between then and now? Still half dazed in mind and wearied in body, he retraces his steps to Greylands, the only home he knows.

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Audrey, after her encounter with him, had turned aside from her intended visit to Greylands, and had wandered idly away into the deepening woods upon her left, lost in sad thoughts of her own making. But as the shadows grow longer and ever longer, and evening thrusts itself upon her, she rouses herself from her gloomy dreamings, and, remindful of her original purpose, once more with hurrying footsteps hastens to Miss Maturin.

Almost at the gates of Greylands, she lifts her eyes, to encounter Anthony Vyner. She is feeling dull and disheartened, and it is without a greeting smile she extends to him her hand.

‘What have you been doing with yourself?’ asked he, regarding her attentively.

‘Thinking,’ returns she, with a sigh. He has never seen her in this mood before, and there is a touch of surprise now in the gaze he has not withdrawn from her.

‘I shall walk up the avenue with you,’ he says, presently; ‘but I never go in now; I can’t bear intruding upon her grief.’

‘No; every one distresses her, I think.’

‘Except you,’ says Vyner, quickly.

‘I think perhaps she knows how I loved Dolores—in truth, almost as well as she deserved to be loved. And, you see, she must talk to some one.’

‘There is Bouverie.’

‘Yes; but one wants a woman sometimes.’

‘That is true,’ confesses he. There is a little silence between them after this, and then—‘I would go even further than you,’ he says; ‘I should say there are one or two people who want some particular woman, not sometimes, but always.’

‘Ah, perhaps!’ She sighs again, and goes with him all

the length of the goodly avenue after that, without vouchsafing him another word. She seems lost in thought, and, glancing at her from time to time, he cannot but see that such thought, for him, contains no place.

As they reach the flight of stone steps that leads up to the hall door, a woman disappears through the portals into the dusky hall beyond; a young man is about to follow her, but something—perhaps the crunching of the gravel beneath their feet—causes him to turn his head. Recognising them, he runs down the steps again and up to them.

It is Sir Chicksy Chaucer, in a high state of heat and excitement.

‘So glad you’ve come,’ he exclaims, addressing Audrey in a voice ecstatically pitched and very nervous—‘so glad! You ought to know, you know. Always been a friend of hers. Yes, yes;—*such* a day as we’ve been having!’ He stops short and wipes his softened brow. ‘Yes, of course, you really *ought* to know, you know,’ he repeats, impressively.

‘We! Of whom are you talking—of Dolores?’ asks Audrey, growing very pale; her voice trembles perceptibly. ‘Is—is she with you?’

‘No, no, bless me—not at all! It is Mrs. Wemyss, you know; excellent woman, Mrs. Wemyss—so superior, so sensible, so *everything*, you know.’

‘I can’t see what it is I need further know about Mrs. Wemyss,’ says Audrey, coldly. Her sudden hopes have died as sudden a death.

‘You don’t understand,’ exclaims Sir Chicksy, struggling wildly with his fragile intellect. ‘We’ve brought home the story, she and I; *such* a chance as it was! Yes, you really *ought* to know, you know. Come up, come up-stairs; *she’ll* tell you all about it, *she’s* got her wits about her.’

‘Thank Heaven!’ ejaculates Mr. Vyner, with a sigh of heartfelt gratitude to beneficent Nature.

‘Tell us *what*?’ demands Audrey, in an agony. ‘Is Dolores dead? What is it? What have you heard?’

She is so pale now and so imperious in manner that the miserable little baronet loses the last remaining fragment of that poor thing he calls his mind. He grows visibly distracted; he appeals vaguely to Vyner, who is regarding him with unexampled amazement.

‘She ought to be prepared,’ he says, ‘she ought indeed; shocks are very bad things. Now *do* be prepared,’ he entreats feebly,



turning again to Audrey. It is quite plain to both his listeners that he has altogether forgotten what it is he wants to say.

'Ah, then it is all over,' murmurs Audrey, brokenly.

'No, no, not yet,—not quite; it may *never* be all over,' cries Sir Chicksy, gesticulating madly. 'We don't know—we can't say—we can't be sure—but you *ought* to be prepared.'

'Who is to prepare me?' exclaims Audrey, in a tone of deep grief largely mingled with irritation. 'Oh, let me get to *somebody* who can speak English!'

She rushes past the bewildered Chaucer, who is still combating with his unfruitful brain, and enters the house.

'Look at that—look at that now!' exclaims he accusingly, turning a hostile glance upon Vyner. 'She's quite upset by all this; she ought to have been prepared. I said so. Why didn't you tell her?'

'Tell her what?'

'Why, all about it!'

'All about *what*?'

'About what we've been talking of, of course,' shouts back the small baronet indignantly.

'Oh, go to the deuce!' says Vyner; and, pushing him to one side, he follows Audrey up the broad oaken staircase to the pretty sitting-room above, where instinct tells him both Miss Maturin and her visitor are to be found.

Here a little scene presents itself that is never afterwards forgotten by Audrey. Mrs. Wemyss, pale and impassioned, with the pretty gaiety that usually distinguishes her thrust into the background, and with tears starting from her eyes, is standing opposite to Miss Maturin upon the hearthrug. She is talking to her in a low and rapid tone, and is using a good deal of expressive gesture.

Miss Maturin, gazing intently at her, is as one turned into stone. Is she glad or sorry? Of that, Audrey, regarding her eagerly from the doorway with a view to ending her own suspense, cannot be sure. She looks so still, so mute, so inexpressive; she has her hands tightened upon the back of the chair close to her, and the pressure put upon them has reduced the nails to an absolute snowy whiteness.

Audrey moves forward. The sound of her coming and the steps of those who follow her breaks up the unnatural quietude that has seized upon Miss Maturin and loosens the tension of

her nerves. A great wave of emotion too long suppressed sweeps over her face. She loses all self-control, and, sinking upon a lounge near her, covers her face with her hands.

'Oh, if there should be any mistake!' she murmurs, in a tone of terrible fear.

'There is none,' declares Mrs. Wemyss, triumphantly—at least so far as Sir Chicksy and I have gone. What lies beyond our discovery is of course as yet unknown. But I look for a happy ending to our beginning; and, at all events, there is *hope*.'

'Audrey, do you hear that?' cries Miss Maturin, holding out her trembling hands. 'There is hope, they tell me. "Hope!" Oh, most blessed word!'

'Hope?' stammers Audrey, who cannot yet divest herself of the fear caught below from Sir Chicksy's blundering explanation.

'Yes; didn't I tell you so?' whispers that youth at her elbow.

'They have brought me tidings of my child,' continues Miss Maturin, with deep agitation. 'She may yet be found. There is *hope*, I tell you—hope!'

She clings to the word. It seems as though she is determined not to loose her hold upon the sacred thing that for so long has been denied to her. She recurs to it again and again.

'You have had news of Dolores?' falters Audrey; and then all suddenly her proud reserve vanishes from her; she turns aside, as though with a vain desire to hide herself, and bursts into tears.

They are the first tears that any one there has ever seen her shed. Some people seem born to shed tears; to others it seems impossible that such sad weaknesses can be ever known. Audrey, proud, reserved, insolent, has passed among her kind as being one of those who are literally devoid of feeling for the joys or woes of their fellow creatures. Her grief now is a revelation. To one of those standing in Miss Maturin's boudoir, the girl—thus bowed down with tender solicitude for her friend—looks sweeter far than ever yet she seemed to him in her brighter, gayer hours.

'Tell her all,' says Miss Maturin, laying her hand on Audrey's arm.

The touch seems pleasant to the girl. She acknowledges

it, and, sinking upon her knees beside Miss Maturin's chair, hides her face in her gown. To see Audrey now—thus clinging with such an utter abandonment of herself—one would hardly recognise her.

'There is so little to tell,' exclaims Mrs. Wemyss, who is still gladly excited. 'But I cannot help thinking even this little may lead to something good. You see, I had started to see a friend at Loans. This morning I went, and at the station met Sir Chicksy. He seemed so idle that I asked him to come with me—most *fortunately* I asked him,' says this good-natured woman. 'He came. We arrived at Loans. I didn't quite know the way to my friend's house; so I sent Sir Chicksy to make inquiries of the station-master. Instead of that he fell into conversation with the station-master's wife, and, well—yes, she—Dolores—had been seen by her—she had been seen *there*—a pretty creature in a dust-coloured ulster and a white gown. What led to the conversation between the woman and Sir Chicksy has never transpired: but I went back myself and cross-examined her, and it was certainly all true. The description exactly answered to Dolores—the little fragile figure, the nervous childish manner. Yes, yes;' Mrs. Wemyss breaks down a little. 'I *know* it was she,' she goes on, with a suppressed sob; 'and so I rushed back to tell you all of this faint clue to her hiding-place.'

Here Sir Chicksy, who is in a fever of excitement, plunges into the conversation.

'Most 'stornary thing!' he says. 'I asked her if the girl she saw wore a white gown. A *white* gown, mind you! I remember how Miss Lorne always wore white. It fetched the old woman in a hurry. 'White?' says she. 'Yes; I saw her from the window as she talked to my man, and her gown was white sure enough.' 'Stornary thing I should have thought of askin' that—eh? Leadin' question—eh? I declare to you, when I heard her answer an' thought of Miss Lorne,' says Sir Chicksy, with tearful joy, 'I was as glad as if I'd got Aud—ah—hem—ha!' coughs Sir Chicksy, retreating into melancholy and the background with his mistake and his confusion.

'You are a good fellow, Chaucer,' says Vyner, grasping his hand and wringing it warmly.

'Yes, yes; when I heard all, I forgot my friend; I hurried back to you,' goes on Mrs. Wemyss. 'But'—nervously—'this may be all! Do not dwell with too great

certainly upon this tale we bring ; disappointment following upon such certainty would be too terrible.'

'Do not speak of disappointment !' exclaims Miss Maturin, rising suddenly to her feet. She has her hand still upon Audrey's arm, and by a slight pressure compels her also to rise from her kneeling position.

'Where is Dick ?' she asks, looking round upon them. 'He must be found at once.'

'He has gone up to town,' answers Audrey, conquering her emotion.

'He must be telegraphed for.'

'I'll do it,' says Vyner, with such unwonted energy, for him, that they all stare.

'Give me his address.'

But no one, it seems, knows his present address. His clubs are of course *en évidence* ; but then he would be unlikely to go to them with misfortune so full upon him, and his heart and brain a-fire with ever-increasing misery.

'What is to be done ?' demands Mrs. Wemyss, with nervous impatience. 'What evil genius drove Mr. Bouverie to town this morning ? Oh, if he were but here now, all might yet be well.'

Hardly has this oracular speech passed her lips when the door is thrown quickly open, and Bouverie himself enters the room.

A little cry from Miss Maturin—a movement towards him. She makes a violent effort to speak, to explain ; but words fail her.

'Tell him,' she says, turning to Mrs. Wemyss and speaking in a low whisper.

He has come slowly into the room, and having greeted those nearest to him, has sunk into a chair, weary and dispirited.

'Dick !' cries Audrey, coming up to him with her cheeks all aglow and her long lashes still moist with that strange shower of tears that fell from her a moment since.

'Dick, they tell us there is news of Dolores.'

Bouverie starts as though shot.

'Oh no !' he exclaims, lifting his hand, as though to ward off a blow. 'One should not jest on subjects such as these. Why, you yourself, not an hour ago, told me she was dead.'

He sighs heavily, and, rising from his seat, moves towards the open window.

'But indeed it is true,' declares Mrs. Wemyss, half sobbing, drawing near to him with her great soft eyes quite full of tears ; and then she tells him all her story—a strange story, singularly incomplete, but it makes a new man of him. Already he looks ten years younger, and his eyes are all afire.

'The hour ?' he asks, turning feverishly to Vyner, without even vouchsafing one word of thanks to Mrs. Wemyss ; but she forgives all that. 'When does the next train start ?'

'In twenty minutes,' replies Sir Chicksy, chucking a 'Bradshaw' he has been studiously examining into Vyner's hands as he speaks. It is a book that I regret to say he had stolen from the waiting room at Loans and has been studying ever since.

'If you hurry, you'll catch it, old man,' says Vyner, kindly. But the words have hardly ceased upon the air when Bouverie is gone, leaving only the sound of his departing footsteps behind him.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

For the shades are about us that hover  
When darkness is half withdrawn,  
And the skirts of the dead night cover  
The face of the live new dawn.

SWINBURNE.

As the train steams slowly into the little station at Loans, Bouverie steps hurriedly out and walks impatiently up and down the diminutive platform until at last the engine, snorting defiance at the meanness of its resting-place, hurries on again, leaving the station-master free.

Going up to him, Bouverie lays his hand upon his arm. Now that he has come to the point, he feels cold and hopeless and utterly out of heart. The station-master, turning to him with some surprise depicted upon his fat face, gazes curiously at the eager, haggard young man looking down at him.

Yes, he distinctly remembers having seen a young 'ooman—a child a'most she was. This was the second time to-day he'd been asked about her. Begging the gentleman's pardon, is he bound on the same inquiry errand as them that came in the morning ?

In a few of the most prosaic words in the language Bouverie gives the station-master to understand that his heart and soul are bent on the successful ending of his quest.

'Ah, just so. Well, I saw her sure enough. Only a minute, as it might be, she lingered on the platform, looking about her as if a bit bewildered. I went up and asked her if I could do anything for her, for she looked quite the lady ; but she answered "No" short like—timid like—and moved away from me. But, after a little while, she came back again to ask me where *that* road'—pointing to a dusty line in the distance—'led to. "To Dorminster," said I. "A secluded place?" asked she, or something o' that sort. "Ay, all that," said I ; and then she thanked me with the prettiest air in the world, and went away from me right up the road.'

Was that all he could tell ? Yes, it was all. He had followed her with his eyes until she was out of sight, not being altogether easy about her ; she being delicate like, and not looking as one might who was accustomed to walking upon stony roads ; but he did not see her again and heard nothing since. 'But'—here his face brightens, as if with some fortunate thought—'perhaps my wife could tell you something more. She too saw the young lady go by from her window. My house is only a mile or so from this, and she had watched her going by. Would you like to ask her a question or two, sir ?'

The gentleman would. He turns and follows the man to his home. But from the little trim woman who comes out to meet him there, very little is to be learned.

'Ah, sir, what a pretty lady—and so sorrowful ! I saw her as she went by this way, passing almost upon the very spot, sir, where now you stand.'

Bouverie starts perceptibly and his eyes seek the ground. 'This very spot !' Did her tender wandering feet indeed touch this place on which he now is standing ?

'I watched her, sir, until I could no longer see her. Look ! Do you notice, sir, where the roads join—over there to the west ? Mayhap not. But I can. I was always a sharp one with my eyes from a youngster. Well, I followed her until she came there, and then I saw she took the road that did *not* lead to Dorminster. I didn't know, sir, until my good man came home that she meant to go to Dorminster, or I'd have found some way to tell her o' the mistake she was making—I felt that sorry for her ! *Such* a pretty young lady she was !!

'Where does the other road—the one the young lady took—lead to?' asks Bouverie.

'To Thurston, sir. A good town too so far as vegetables goes, but nothing to Derminster.'

'Have you a trap of any sort—a horse?' demands Dick, turning with ill-suppressed impatience to the station-master.

'A horse, sir? Yes; but not for harness.'

But it is all the same to Bouverie, to ride or drive, so long as he is getting nearer to *her*. To arrange matters with the station-master about the loan of his horse is but the work of a moment. There is no question about terms. Leaving his card and a sufficient sum of money to buy the melancholy animal presently produced—as surety for its return—Bouverie starts upon his journey.

It is still hot noon, and as yet the sun, though sinking, has not made a near approach to the end of its race, when Dick pulls rein before the wayside cottage where Dolores had craved a rest.

The good woman of the house, coming forward, curtsies gravely to the strangely pale young man who, dismounting, steps quickly up to her.

'Some time since—a *long* time since—a month,' begins he, nervously, 'a young lady might have come by your place—she *might*, I say. Did you see her? Do you know anything of her? If you do—gazing with heartfelt entreaty into her eyes—'I implore you——' Here he breaks down for a moment, and, turning aside, makes some transparently unnecessary effort to alter his girth. '*Can* you tell me anything?' he asks, presently, in a low, broken tone.

'A young lady? Ay, truly, it would be a month come yesterday since a young lady walked in here to me and asked if she might sit for a bit. A lady she was certainly, and quite a young thing too. Purty, but so silent, an' with a sad, *sad* story in her eyes the while; perhaps it is her you look for, sir?'

'Yes,' says Dick, hoarsely.

'Ay, so! I guessed she come of decent people, she was that quiet and reserved.'

'Did she—was she—how did she look?' blurts out Dick at last, still employing himself with a fictitious examination of the paltry housings of the animal he has bestridden.

'Main bad, sir, an' sorry I am to tell it to the likes o' you, an' of her—main bad! Her face was white as the driven

snow, an' her little hands were trembling ; and her feet—— She hesitates, checked by something in his face.

He has turned completely round, forgetful of his agitation.

'What?' he demands, imperiously.

'They were bleeding! Ay, indeed, the poor little soul!' says the woman, subdued almost into silence by the terrible look in his eyes.

There is a silence that seems long ; and then—

'It *can't* be her of whom you speak!' he exclaims, in a low vehement tone. 'It is impossible!' His face looks ghastly. 'Her feet—her little, poor, pretty feet,' he murmurs faintly—the very despair in his voice killing the thought that he finds anything to disbelieve in her statement. 'She could not have been *much* hurt! Not *much*! Say it!' cries he, turning suddenly upon the woman with a passionate agony of grief in his eyes.

Then, as suddenly as it came, all the passion dies from him, and, letting his arms fall upon the seat of his saddle and his head on his arms, he bursts into tears.

'An' the best thing that could happen to him,' murmurs the excellent Mrs. Burnet ; and, as if to show how sincere she is in her belief, she takes his recipe herself, and, covering her face with her apron, sobs unrestrainedly for several minutes in the most comfortable manner possible.

'Take heart, dear,' she whispers after a while. 'While there's life there's hope, you know, an' she may be found yet Leastways, if you and I be thinking of the same lady. A white frock she wore, with ribbons on it blue as her eyes, bless her. Pale blue they were. May happen her eyes were grey to some.'

'Yes, grey,' says Dick. Then, with a forlorn reproach in his tone—'Why didn't you keep her till we found her?' he asks, miserably.

'Because she was bent on going,' says Mrs. Burnet. 'An' who was I, to try an' stop the likes o' her! She was for ever startin' an' turnin' too, an' lookin' up an' down the road as if expectin' some one to overtake her. You—you don't mean her ill, do you?' asks the good woman, regarding him searchingly.

'I don't know how I could,' returns Dick, simply, 'when I love her as I do.'

'Ay, so!' says Mrs. Burnet, admiringly. 'An' are you her man?' She pauses awhile, as if lost in the vastness of this new knowledge ; and then—'I wish I could help you,



sir,' she says, sadly ; 'but indeed I have no more to tell you. She left me without a word that could give me a hint as to where she was going, except that she asked me how far it was to Thurston. She was the sweetest creature I ever saw, so gentle, so grateful for the little I could do for her. Here at the door when she was going she turned an' kissed me.' The good woman's eyes fill with tears again at the recollection, and she hastily wipes them in her apron.

'Thurston?' repeats Dick, quickly.

He flings himself into the saddle. He has long ago squeezed something into Mrs. Burnet's hand, and now rides up to her gate eager to pursue his search afresh. But, as he stoops to lift the tiny latch with his whip, he hears her voice calling after him, and sees her running towards him fast as age and a comely stoutness will permit.

'Stay, sir,' she cries ; 'there is one thing—it comes to my mind now ! Awhile ago I heard, through one of the neighbours, that a strange young lady had come to stay at a house about four miles from this. I asked about her, being curious like, and it seemed to me that she was like the young lady who came here. Had she relations in these parts, sir ?'

'No,' says Dick, 'no, it could not be she.'

'Still, what they told me of her was like her,' persists Mrs. Burnet, eagerly, 'and there seemed to be something mysterious too—queer, as it were. 'Tis on your way, sir ; why wouldn't you see if it might be she ?'

'On my way ?'

'Yes, sure, to Thurston. I had thought many a time to go over there myself—to the Cottage, I mean—that's what 'tis called—to see if it might be *my* young lady—beggin' your pardon, sir—but I have so much to do that spare moments is almost unknown to me ! An old gentleman lives at the Cottage ; very charitable he be, though given to solitary habits, and never mixin' with the neighbours round ; an' so I thought as how——'

'Yes, I'll go there,' decides Bouverie.

Turning in his saddle, he smiles down at her. There is a brightness in his face she had not seen there before—a sort of vague unsatisfactory hope that still has comfort in it.

'Why, there now, I'm glad to see you smile at me,' exclaims she, kindly. Then—'Go your ways,' she says, waving him onwards, 'an' I'll pray Heaven you may have some'at better than me to smile at before you find your bed this night.'

## CHAPTER XXXII.

The tears inside our eyelids met,  
Wrung forth with kissing, and wept wet  
The faces cleaving each to each  
Where the blood served for speech.

SWINBURNE.

THE dying sun is glinting through the waving trees, making warm patches of light upon the mossy sward. There is no sound upon the calm evening air save the murmur of the stream and the gentle movement of the boughs and grasses. Just here the lawn is lost in a dense shadow cast by the branching trees that grow low down until their drooping leaves reach even to the water's bosom.

The inexplicable sweetness of the air, the softness, the purity of tone, the depth of the greenness that lies within that charmed range of firs upon the right hand, who shall give voice to it all? It is indeed a perfect evening, a lingering remembrance of a most perfect summer.

Sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things.

Dolores, standing in the foreground of this charming picture, with her hands clasped listlessly before her, looks as though her pale young head has been already bound by that sad wreath. A slight willowy figure she appears, gazing with sorrowing eyes into her past, and forgetful for the moment of a future that can contain for her no hope.

She is clad in a white gown—the same white gown in which she left her home, now made fresh and pretty again as Mrs. Edgeworth's hands could manage. The last beams of the sun are dancing brilliantly about her head, which is scarcely a degree less sunny than they: on every branch the birds are chanting their evensong, but all unheeded by her. Her thoughts are far away; lost in mournful memories of home—of him!

Her glance is fixed upon that tiny speck of the great ocean that shows clearest through the break in the beech trees. Is she thinking of a day now gone, when she had walked hand in hand with one most dear to her along a gleaming shore, a love-light in her eyes brighter than 'saint-seducing gold?'

She is quite motionless. Not a movement betrays the fact

that she is living. Her soul is wandering, and the body waits in silent ecstasy for its return. Her fragile form scarcely resists the evening breeze ; her face, too thin, alas, and worn, and too full of spirituality for our gross earth, is slightly lifted, so that one watching may mark the ravages that grief and illness have laid on it. There are no tears within her eyes ; but there is a sad wistfulness about her earnest mouth more pitiful than any weeping.

Now she sighs faintly, and her glance wanders to the yellow hills beyond, on which already the mists of evening are descending. Perhaps there, just behind them, lies her home—dear word !—and all that made life sweet.

How long is it since last she dwelt with those she loves ? Four weeks ? Nay, a century rather. What a world of time has passed her by since then ! Must all her coming days be dreary as these last, all colourless, all blank ? She trembles as she pictures to herself the terrible monotony of the grey existence she has sketched out for herself, an existence barren of love and tender ties, and such fond trivial things, that serve to make life bearable.

Well, it is better so ! The twining fingers clasp each other with a fiercer warmth, and the throbbing heart beats back a growing sob. And it is all so long ago now, and no word, no sign. Yes, they *must* deem her dead ! No doubt they now think of her as one lying in her quiet grave with all life's torments ended, and that sad stain upon her name lost, left behind in the world's hurry as it marches ever onward in hot haste.

And, indeed, if by this time they have begun to think of her as dead, they have not so very far exceeded the truth. Another faint deepening of that heavy fever, a few days' more exhaustion, and she might have been reckoned with those who are no longer among the living. So near she was to the end of her life's journey that almost they might believe she had reached it.

Oh, how cruel were the kindly hands that had pulled her back from the grave ! What an irreparable injury did these Good Samaritans do her when they raised her from her sick couch and rescued her from the arms of that most lovely Death, into whose embrace she would so willingly have sunk !

Now, even now, she might have been at rest, lying with straightened limbs and feverless brain, with nothing to press upon her heart save the cool earth and the throbings of the

gently-growing grasses. Under the dewy sod she would be resting in a great peace, her soul in heaven.

She clasps her little slender hands and sighs convulsively. In heaven home might have been found again, and the dear Father of us all would have forgiven her sins. She had been wicked perhaps—yes, *often*; but indeed she had tried to be good—only there is so much always to be longed for here, although so little to be gained !

To live as we should always die,  
It were a goodly trade ;  
To change low death for life so high,  
No better change is made.  
For all our worldly things are vain,  
In them there is no trust ;  
We see all things awhile remain,  
And then they change to dust.

How still it grows, how long the shadows lie ! Already Apollo has sunk behind the nearest hills in a crimson glory. How quickly the stars are coming out to deck the summer sky ! Is it as being behind those stars that they dream of her at home ? Has even Dick come to think of her as dead ? Oh, dear, dear Dick ! Did he *know* how she loved him—that it was for him—to save *him* from the dull burning pain that will live in her own heart for ever, that she left all, *all* ?

A dry but passionate sob breaks from her. It seems to agitate all her delicate frame. The eager longing of her spirit is almost past control as she dwells on what is and what might have been, had not those past days, so rich in gladness, been overshadowed by so cruel a cloud.

With a little gesture full of despair, she turns as though to go in-doors. Her sudden movement prevents a young man—who for a long time has been watching her in a nervous anxiety that has checked his desire to advance—from falling back into the shadow of the evergreens behind him. Thus surprised, he wisely stands still, and lets his longing eyes seek hers.

Then all in a moment she sees him. Her mind flies back from distant thoughts of him to the knowledge that he is *here* ! Before her ! Standing over there in this most blessed twilight !

He comes quickly up to her and holds out his arms, an agony of love upon his face. She runs to him ; she flings her innocent arms around his neck and clings to him as a tired

child might cling who in its weariest hour has regained its parent's breast.

No tears fall from her ; no word escapes her. She lies within his arms quiescent, hardly her breath seems to pass her lips.

'My darling, my *soul* !' exclaims the young man with uncontrollable emotion. 'Speak to me, let me hear your voice !'

As though the sound of the old well-loved tones has power to rouse her, she stirs within his arms, and a heavy sigh escapes her. For a moment she regains consciousness.

'It has been a long, *long* time !' she whispers, so faintly that he has to stoop to hear her.

'*Too long* !' returns he, with vehemence.

He might perhaps have said more, but something—some slight lessening of the hold of the gentle arms tells him the truth. Gazing with anxious haste into her face, he sees that she has fainted.

Lifting his shadowy burden and holding it close to his heart, Bouverie moves towards the house. Holding thus the thing he loves best in the world, he learns with a bitter pang of sorrow how light his burden is—*so* light that it can hardly so be called. How white she looks—how still ! Is it only unconsciousness, or is it— With a look of terror upon his face, he hastens his footsteps.

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Perhaps it is the rapid movement through the air, perhaps the beating of her lover's heart so near her own, or the mere consciousness of his presence that revives her ; at all events, before he has half covered the ground that separates them from the house, she is restored to life again.

She struggles faintly to her feet, and, still leaning heavily against him, sighs softly.

'It is you, then, Dick, and no dream ?' she whispers, at last.

'It is I, my darling.'

'Don't take me to the house—at least not yet. The soft air does me good ; and there are so many things I must say to you *alone*.'

She sinks upon a garden-seat near her, and he, wrapping a loose shawl that is lying there very tenderly around her, seats himself beside her. They are so hemmed in by the rhododendrons that they are quite hidden from the outer world.

'You are sure you are better here than indoors?' he asks her, anxiously.

'Quite sure. It was only a momentary weakness. It is gone now. You startled me a little'—with a wan smile. 'Not you so much perhaps, as the strange fear that what I saw was merely a vision, and that I should wake from it presently to find you as lost to me as you were before.'

'You have been ill?' says the young man, abruptly, unmistakable anguish in his tone.

'Yes, for a short time. But never mind that now. Tell me of——'

'I *must* mind it. What is it that has made you the wreck you now are?'

'A fever of some sort. But it was nothing much, or I could not be so well as I am now. You can see that for yourself.'

'I can see that you are but a shadow of your former self.'

'A very substantial shadow. Oh, Dick, hear me. I will tell you all you want to know afterwards, but first tell me of Lallie.'

'What of her?'

'She is well?'—with tremulous anxiety.

'Well as a distressed mind will let her be. You alone fill all her thoughts night and day. Think then if she can be altogether as well as you could wish her.'

'You are unkind,' says the girl, with a quick sob.

'Just now she is buoyed up with a hope, which, thank God, will not prove an altogether vain one. But if I had failed to find you—— Oh, dear, dear love!' cries he, with passionate reproach, 'how could you so have trifled with what was all the world to us—*your life*?'

'I didn't invite the fever to visit me,' returns she, in quaint defence. 'It wasn't *my* fault that it came, though in truth I am very much obliged to it in many ways. Those first days of happy unconsciousness, and those others, when I was too weak to feel anything but indifference, killed the time that lay for me between then and now. Had I been in my proper senses all those interminable hours, I should have been driven to my death by fretting and worrying and longing—for you! But yet'—steadfastly—'believe me, I should never have sought you or recalled you—never! I would have lived my pain through, even though my life should be its cost. And now'

—sadly—‘it has all to be done over again. My past trouble goes for naught’—she catches her breath heavily. ‘Tell me,’ she says, presently, ‘how it was I failed—how you discovered me.’

‘It wasn’t I,’ returns Dick. Then he laughs with an irresistible merriment. ‘I give you a guess,’ he says, ‘as to who was the finder.’

‘Audrey?’

‘No—Sir Chicksy! There! Did you ever think he would rise to such a height—to be regarded as a person of vital importance, the actual discoverer of our little deserter?’

‘You mustn’t call me names,’ murmurs she, with a faint return of the old pretty mischievous spirit.

This gleam from the far-off days strikes with a certain sense of pain upon Bouverie’s heart. His eyes fill with tears.

‘I have answered all your questions,’ he says. ‘Now answer mine. Tell me how it is you are here, and with whom.’

In a few words she makes him master of all her actions from the hour she left Greylands until now. With simple but earnest gratitude she dwells upon the tender care showered upon her by these strangers, into whose life she has fallen.

‘Without a hesitation, not knowing who or what I was,’ she concludes, ‘they took me in and tended me with a carefulness, a sympathy, not to be surpassed. So long as I live, I shall bear in my heart the memory of their good deeds to me.’

‘It is well to know that their reward is sure,’ says Bouverie, solemnly.

There is silence for a while, and then suddenly, as though some thought he has been harbouring has been too strong for him, he turns to her with a curious anger in his eyes that is still overpowered by love.

‘What did you mean by treating us as you did?’ he asks. ‘Did you understand? Did you do it *wilfully*? Or is it possible you could not guess at the depth of the misery to which you consigned us? It was a living death we endured from day to day. Did you *know* how we suffered?’ He lays his hand upon her shoulder, and compels her to meet his burning eyes.

‘Yes, for I suffered too,’ returns she, gently.

‘Not one hundredth part so much as we did. I tell you it was horrible, the doubt, the despair, the everlasting fear!’

‘Ah, do not scold me!’ entreats she, lovingly. She nestles

closer to him. She steals one hand round his neck, and with the other turns his sad face to her own. 'Dear, *good* Dick,' she whispers, wooingly, and presses upon his lips a little soft fond kiss. There is a pause, and then—'I do think,' she says, with flattering conviction, 'that you have the very handsomest and nicest face in all the world.'

What man could withstand this? Bouverie, in spite of his stern endeavour to the contrary, smiles broadly.

'There now—see how conceited we can look!' exclaims his temptress, meanly taking advantage of his slight dereliction from the cold paths of virtue. As she speaks, she blushes generously and laughs aloud.

But this very giving voice to her mirth murders it. She starts, as though struck by some unknown hand. The mere sound of her own merriment has frightened her. She checks it and pales again.

'I do not think I have laughed,' she says, in a troubled whisper, 'since last I saw you.' Some painful recollection returns to her, and she shudders. 'Oh, those last days!' she cries. 'If I could only forget them! If I might blot them from my happy past; but they spoil all!'

'Our past may not be altered,' says Bouverie. 'But, to compensate for it, there is always the bright possibility of a glad future.'

'The future! To me it brings no comfort,' returns she, with lowered eyes and tone.

'It shall!' declares Dick, stoutly.

At this moment a voice comes to them across the scented lawn.

'Miss Dolores, Miss Dolores!'

'I am coming,' returns Dolores, quickly.

'Oh, come, come, come! Do, my dear. The dew is beginning to fall.'

'It isn't, you know,' says Dolores, softly, smiling at Dick. 'But Mrs. Edgeworth hates to see me out after sundown.'

'She is right. Yes, come in,' exclaims Bouverie, repentantly. 'How mad of me to have kept you out all this time! Come, darling!'

'Not until you say you have forgiven me. You were angry with me a moment since. I cannot bear that. If I have caused you pain, Dick, try—*try* to learn that it was for your own sake I inflicted it.'

'I suppose you meant it so. But what a mistake it has all



been! And how could you have kept silence for so long? Why did you not write?’

‘I have told you. I wished you to forget me! And then I fell ill; and then—then I hoped you would believe me dead.’

‘What cruelty can lie behind a little saint-like face!’ exclaims Bouverie, taking the ‘saint-like face’ between his hands and regarding it long and earnestly. ‘My sweetheart, how pale you are!’ he says, presently. ‘Surely the cruelty I spoke of has recoiled upon yourself. Oh, my poor little pallid love!’ Then, with a sudden triumphant change of tone—‘But what does it all matter,’ cries he, ‘since you are alive—*alive*, and in my arms?’ With a rush of the most impulsive, tenderest passion, he catches her to his beating heart, holding her there closely, as though to assure himself that it is indeed she, the woman he adores, changed perhaps and saddened by her swift glance at life, but still her very own self in the flesh. Though not very *much* flesh certainly, to confess the truth!

‘Come in,’ he says, presently; ‘you must not remain any longer here.’

‘Well, let me now introduce you to Mr. Mildmay,’ returns she; and, slipping her hand into his, conducts him across the lawn and through the tiny garden to where a glass door stands that gives access to Mr. Mildmay’s study.

Two stone steps lead up to this door.

‘Keep a little behind me,’ she whispers, with a pretty half-mischievous smile; and then, opening the glass door, she steps lightly into the room.

At her entrance, an old man—as he appears to Dick—rises from his seat and advances to greet her, with the gentle smile of welcome upon his lips he always has for her.

‘I have come to bring such news—good news—really *great* news!’ cries Dolores, with charming excitement in voice and manner. She throws out her hands a little. ‘Dick has come,’ she says—‘Dick!’ She is evidently of the opinion that ‘Dick’ is a person of world-wide renown. ‘He has found me out! He is *here*;—see!’—as Bouverie comes slowly into view, smiling also. ‘*This* is Dick!’ It is with unconcealed pride she thus introduces him. ‘Come in, Dick; you may come quite in. Oh, dear, *dear* Mr. Mildmay, aren’t you glad?’

She throws her arms round Mr. Mildmay’s neck as she says this and gives him a warm hug in her great joy.

‘Some one from your old home? This is indeed a happy

occasion,' says Mr. Mildmay, gently, though perhaps he does not look altogether so happy as he could wish. Is his little bird of passage to be so soon borne away from her strange nest? There is something almost dismal in the careful gaiety of his glance as he turns it full on Bouverie. 'I bid you welcome, sir, although our little friend'—patting her soft curls with a loving hand—'has omitted to tell me aught of you except your Christian name.'

'My other name is Bouverie,' returns Dick, with a courteous bow.

But the word has scarcely passed his lips when a change comes over Mr. Mildmay. He starts as if hurt, and a leaden hue covers his face. He tries to say something, but fails; and then all at once Dolores feels him grow heavy as he leans against her. He shudders, and, but that Bouverie catches him as he sways forward, would have fallen inertly to the ground.

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### CHAPTER XXXIII.

Sorrow had filled her shaken eyelids' blue,  
And her mouth's sad red heavy rose all through  
Seemed sad with glad things gone.

SWINBURNE.

He is still only half conscious. Mrs. Edgeworth, bending over him, is applying some nostrums of her own decocting to his mouth and nose; Dolores is holding his hand and gazing at him with the keenest anxiety in her lovely eyes. Bouverie, at a little distance, is also watching him, with a fascinated intentness he does not disguise even from himself. Who is it that this old man resembles? He, as well as Dolores, has discovered in Mr. Mildmay a remarkable likeness to some person or persons unknown.

'What caused the faint, miss? What happened to him?' asks Mrs. Edgeworth of Dolores, in a low tone.

'I don't know. I haven't the faintest idea,' returns Dolores, in deep distress. 'He came there to the door to greet me as kindly as usual. I brought in my friend, and—— How was it, Dick?'—turning to Bouverie. 'I think I had just barely time to introduce you to him when he fainted—eh?'

'Ay, so !' says the housekeeper, curiously. She has hardly taken any notice of Dick up to this ; but now she regards him with open scrutiny.

'Your name, sir ?' she asks, quietly, with the utmost respect.

'Bouverie,' returns Dick, fixing his eyes on her. She turns her head abruptly aside, pretending to busy herself with her patient, but not before Bouverie has noticed the dull red that has flamed into her cheeks, and the trembling of her lips.

'I must regret that my name is my name,' he says, calmly, still watching her, 'if, as I must believe, it has been the cause of your master's illness.'

'The name certainly is known to him,' acknowledges Mrs. Edgeworth, in a constrained tone. 'In former days he was—was connected with it in some way, and sorrow has attached itself to those days. But, doubtless, sir, there are many of your name—so many that we need not connect you with those who—whose lives were once mixed up with Mr.—Mildmay's.'

Her hesitation is apparent. That she has found a difficulty in pronouncing her master's name is felt by both Dick and Dolores.

'I wish——' she begins, and then breaks off abruptly to turn her attention to Mr. Mildmay, who has now sufficiently recovered from his unconsciousness to be able to recognise those around him.

As if instinctively, his glance wanders to Bouverie.

'I fear I have distressed you,' says Dick, advancing to him and speaking regretfully. 'Perhaps it will be better for me to——'

'No, no ; I beg you will stay where you are,' exclaims Mr. Mildmay, rightly interpreting his meaning. 'You have done me no harm. A sudden thought—the remembrance of some old ties now severed—the hurried return of some lost memories, all helped to upset me ; and my heart is perhaps not altogether so strong as it once was. I am to-day an older man, sir, than I should be.'

Bouverie would have spoken again, but he checks him.

'I beg you will stay with us to-night, and as long as you remain in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Edgeworth will get you a room—eh ?'—turning to the housekeeper.

'Certainly, sir, if the gentleman will not object to putting up with some trifling inconveniences. The house is small,' answers Mrs. Edgeworth, with lowered glance.

'I only hope you will give yourself no trouble on my account,' says Dick, pleasantly. 'I thank you very much, Mr. Mildmay, and'—with a hurried glance at his little love—'would like you to know that I shall be happier here than anywhere in the world.'

'That is well,' says Mr. Mildmay. 'I had hardly time to understand much, but I think Dolores said you were a friend of hers?' He bends a keen if somewhat exhausted glance upon the young man.

'More than that,' returns Dick, smiling. 'I am her affianced husband.'

'No, no, Dick,' murmurs the girl, with a warning gesture; but Bouverie declines to notice it.

'So, so!' says the old man, thoughtfully. He holds out his hand to Dolores. 'Come here,' he commands her, gently. She obeys him, and, kneeling down by his side, lays her cheek against his shoulder in one of the pretty caressing fashions that belong to her.

Bouverie, turning aside, engages Mrs. Edgeworth in a whispered consultation about the postal arrangements in this part of the country.

'So you take up the thread of your life again?' says Mr. Mildmay, laying his hand upon Dolores's shoulder. 'This young man—you will return with him? You will go back to your people? I shall be again bereft.' There is in his voice the most mournful intonation. 'You were like *her*,' he goes on, musingly; 'all my heart went out to you. If my little daughter had lived, she could not have been dearer to me; and now I lose you too. I shall not see you again. I am too old to push my way once more into the unfriendly world, and you'—an expression of indescribable melancholy steals over his face—'you will forget,' he murmurs, with sad prophecy.

'No, no, my more than father!' whispers the girl, tremulously. 'Do not thus misjudge me. To forget such love as yours would be impossible. My secret is as yet unknown to you; but, believe me, this coming of my friend has not altered my determination to separate myself from—from those who are to me the dearest upon earth.'

Her voice falters; but her spirit, as seen through her clear eyes, is still steadfast in its sad renunciation.

'You will stay here, then?' asks he, eagerly.

'That would be impossible. I must leave you, if only to

hide myself again from those who would seek to persuade me to return home—to their own detriment. How hard it is to explain, hampered as I am by fear of discovery!’ cries she, with a burst of sorrowful impatience.

‘I have told you I would not seek to inquire into your history,’ murmurs Mr. Mildmay, somewhat wistfully. ‘But——’

‘Yes—yes. I have decided,’ interrupts she, feverishly. ‘I will confide in you. You shall know *all* when—when *he* is gone again, and I am left alone.’

The touch of utter desolation in her eyes as she says this goes to the old man’s heart.

‘Poor child!’ he whispers, faintly. He leans back in his chair, and again the ashen hue overspreads his face. By an effort he rouses himself, and, motioning to Dolores to rise to her feet, turns to Bouverie.

‘I fear I must ask you to excuse me, sir, for this evening,’ he says, in an exhausted tone, but with gentle dignity. ‘I feel a good deal shaken; that little nervous attack of a moment since has so unstrung me that I am afraid I cannot in person minister to your comfort to-night. But I leave you in able hands.’ He smiles kindly, and makes a gesture of the hand towards Dolores. ‘Our little friend will entertain you,’ he continues, gently; ‘doubtless you and she have much to say to each other after so long and so trying a parting.’

He touches the girl’s hand affectionately, and then, with much apparent difficulty, rises from his chair. He looks old and enfeebled; Bouverie, going hastily to his side, draws his hand through his arm, and leads him to the door.

‘I thank you, sir,’ says Mr. Mildmay, courteously. In some little odd way it now becomes apparent to all present that he avoids using Bouverie’s name when addressing him. ‘I have indeed become an old man,’ he declares, with a sigh—‘older than I should be.’ At the door he comes to a standstill and regards Dick long and earnestly.

‘Not a feature, not a feature!’ he mutters to himself; and then, aloud—‘Your face is unfamiliar, sir; I see no likeness—*none*, though I had fancied I might have traced some small resemblance. What——’ A question is plainly hovering upon his lips, but he suppresses it.

‘Enough, enough!’ he says, hurriedly. ‘Tut, tut, tut! What foolish thoughts we have! To-morrow perhaps, to-morrow!’

He salutes Bouverie with old-world courtesy, and, taking

the housekeeper's arm, quits the room with her, thus leaving the lovers alone.

The long, long conversation that ensues between them has not as yet shown even the first signs of wear, when Mrs. Edgeworth returns to them, accompanied by a 'neat-handed Phyllis,' bearing a tea-equipage.

Acknowledging her presence to be a fatal barrier to further love-dreams, Bouverie, with a sigh, comes back to the present, and shakes himself clear of the light, happy, but, alas, too fragile bands that hope has been weaving round him. He had been lost in an ecstatic future, where Dolores's slight shadowy figure moved as queen—a future he had ever pictured to himself before the blight descended upon them, and that cruel bolt had fallen from out the blue of their lives to blast their fondest desires.

Mrs. Edgeworth, standing respectfully, pours out their tea and carves the fowl (whilst Bouverie cuts the delicate ham into faintest shreds), and presses the dainty hot cakes of her own making upon the pleasant-voiced young man, who has in so short a time made an inroad upon her matronly heart.

There is, too, among all her other virtues, an inward sense of sympathy that compels this worthy woman to hasten over her duties at the tea-table. She refrains from lingering; she cuts many small—usual, but useless—services short. She, in a word, helps the lovers to that renewed solitude where alone—a memory born of her bygone days assures her—they can be entirely happy.

'There is one thing you can do for me,' says Dolores, some where in the fond desultory talk that follows on Mrs. Edgeworth's second disappearance. 'You remember that woman we were speaking of just now, into whose cottage I went on my way here, the woman who directed you to this cottage? Mrs. Burnet, I think, you said her name was?'

'Yes—Mrs. Burnet.'

'Well, she was kinder to me than I can say, and I should like to do her a kindness in return. She has a daughter who loves some one, and by whom she is beloved; but they cannot marry because of an obstacle that stands between them. It is not so bad a one as that which separates us,' sighs she, lifting her lustrous eyes to his, all heavy with sudden tears; 'but still it keeps them apart; and I would lower it if I could.'

'What is the obstacle, my love?' asks he, softly, taking her hand in both his own.

'Money. They have none, and I want to give it to them.'

Lallie—if you will tell her of it—will give them the few hundreds they require, for my sake.’

‘You shall tell her yourself, and you shall take the money yourself, too, to Mrs. Burnet’s daughter.’

‘Oh, no, I shall not be in a position to do it. I have separated myself from you all. I shall never go home again.’

‘As you will about that, darling. Home, after all, is only where those are whom we love. We can go away together, you and I. I have *some* money, you know,’—smiling—‘and we will see if we cannot cheat starvation with it when you are my wife.’

‘Not *that* word, Dick—any other word but that ! I shall never be your wife. Do not mistake me about this.’

‘What a little tyrant ! Would you then condemn me to the miseries of an eternal bachelorhood ?’ demands he, lightly, with an assumption of gaiety he is in reality far from feeling. There is a pause ; and then—

‘As for that,’ says she, in a low tone and with averted face, ‘I suppose in some one of the far-off years you will hardly remember the thoughts of to-day. You will marry somebody—who will not be me.’ A heavy sigh breaks from her. ‘Why should you not ?’ she goes on, desperately. ‘Some day, when all this will be regarded by you as a very old story, you will, perhaps, love and be loved by some sweet woman, and let her be to you—what I—can *never* be.’

Her voice fails her ; but bravely she conquers the momentary emotion that has arisen out of her heart’s agony, and gently lifts her face to his.

‘One thing, Dick,’ she says, brokenly—‘one thing ; remember ! She—she will not love you more faithfully than I do !’

Here he would have spoken ; but she checks him.

‘I know what you would say,’ she murmurs ; ‘but it is useless. Yes, I have thought it all over, and I know that in time you may forget. But’—piteously, breaking down a little—‘it will not be for a *long* time, will it, Dick ?’

‘I hope not,’ says Bouverie, steadily, ‘as it will only be when death overtakes me.’

In spite of herself her face changes at this passionate answer ; a happier gleam illumines it, and her hand trembles within his.

‘You must tell Lallie everything,’ she continues, presently ; ‘and, when we are again separated, be *good* to her. Yes, *you* must be the one to tell her all.’

‘You, darling—not me. To confess the truth to you, I

made Mrs. Edgeworth promise to send a telegram to Miss Maturin an hour ago, that will bring her here to-morrow, I don't doubt.'

'Ah !' She flushes warmly, and her hand tightens upon his ; then the warm colour fades, and a deathly paleness takes its place. Bouverie watches her anxiously. Has his intelligence been too much for her ? She lifts her head presently, and a deep sigh escapes her.

'To see her—*so soon* !' she whispers, faintly ; but he can see that the light of a great content is making her face glad.

'So be prepared for a scolding,' he exclaims, with affected lightness. 'I warn you in time that *she* will bring you to your senses, though I have failed, and will show you what a little sinner you have been. Do you think she will countenance your hard-hearted scheme of condemning me to a life of single wretchedness ?'

'Ah, do not make things too hard for me,' she entreats, mournfully. 'Let us talk of that no more ; believe me, I shall never be nearer to you than I am to-day.'

She lets her eyes meet his in sorrowful earnestness, and so marks the shadow that at last he has found it impossible to banish from his face. Upon this her tortured heart knows yet another pang.

'Darling,' she says, bending towards him, 'do not look like that ! Even if I cannot be to you what you will, still I do not deny to you that I feel it a most sweet and blessed thing to have you near me as you now are. In all the barren hours that lie before us, we shall at least have this *one* to remember.'

To make her any rejoinder just then seems to him impossible ; yet something perhaps he would have said, but that Mrs. Edgeworth, reappearing at this moment with a small tray containing wine and biscuits, puts an end to sentimental phrases.

She comes in with quite a little bustle, and, in a few minutes, has put the lovers to rout with great slaughter. Having administered her wine and biscuits, she takes captive the youngest and weakest of them, and bears her off in triumph to the dainty dungeon upstairs, where she tucks her safely into her bed, in spite of all protests.

'I'm not going to have you laid up on my hands again for any one—no, not if he was as handsome again,' she says,



sternly, beating up the pillows as if it were Dolores's own self she was in the act of punishing.

'Wake me early,' begs the captive, feebly.

'If I hear of your getting out from between these sheets till ten o'clock to-morrow, I'll know the reason why,' retorts the gaoler, fiercely.

\* \* \* \* \*

'Which I've always said it, and I'll stick to it,' says Mrs. Edgeworth to herself later on, when she has bidden Dick too, good-night, with a respectful curtesy, on the threshold of his door, 'that there's nothing like having young people in a house; and, of all sorts, give me lovers!' She smiles a genial smile. 'But Bouverie, *Bouverie*?' She ponders awhile, standing still in the middle of the passage, candlestick in hand. 'Well,' she goes on presently, as though relieved, 'he's not like the old baronet in any one feature, that's certain. Let's hope he has got nothing to do with *that* family, at all events!'

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

There is no hate that is so hateworthy.

O Love's lute heard about the lands of death.

SWINBURNE.

To gaze with unseeing eyes upon a sun-smitten landscape through a half-opened window has been Dolores's sole occupation for the last fifteen minutes. To the one waiting in fearful expectancy for what may bring them certain joy, time drags in slothful style.

How many times has she glanced at the aged clock that stands upright in the hall, as if defying its very self! How often has its stolid face assured her that sixty seconds run to every minute, and not one? Its incorruptibility preys upon her.

Not even Bouverie is here to whisper comfort, and convince her that she is *not* impatient. He went a good hour ago—oh, what an interminable hour!—to the nearest railway-station to meet Miss Maturin and bring her hither. But has she come? *Will* she? He might have brought a *thousand* aunts here by this time! Even as this extraordinary reflection

occurs to her, a swift step in the hall may be heard. Dolores, paling, leaves her place at the window and advances inwards. The door is thrown hurriedly open ; some one enters. Yes, it is Lallie, but how strange, how altered ! She is white as death itself, and is trembling in every limb.

‘Child—child—*darling* !’ she murmurs, brokenly.

She holds out her arms, and in a moment has folded Dolores within them. It is a supreme moment ! Her lost treasure has been regained !

‘Ah, I have been very wrong ! I have done what I should not—I see it now !’ sobs Dolores, clinging to her. Oh, the blessedness of having that kind bosom near her once again to be the recipient of her griefs ! All last night she had lain awake, preparing herself for the reproaches, the upbraidings that at last she has come to feel are alone her due ; and now—*now* !

‘Not a word—not a word, my darling !’ cries Miss Maturin, the tears running down her cheeks. ‘I will not have you accuse yourself in any way. Oh, to think of all you have suffered, my poor little pretty one !’

Such sweet condonement of her fault, such generous forgetfulness of all the miserable hours in which she—Miss Maturin herself—had so suffered, pierces Dolores’s heart. With a low but vehement sob, she throws back her head and gazes into Miss Maturin’s eyes with almost a tragic meaning in her own.

‘Have you nothing else to say,’ she says—‘no angry word ? Until I saw Dick yesterday, I never thought how you and he would have to endure as well as I. I meant to save you from further evil ; but I only hurt and grieved almost to death the two for whom I was giving up my life. I have been selfish—cruel ! But still—ah, what is it I now must do ?’ cries she, with a fresh burst of despair.

‘Oh, hush, my child !’ whispers Miss Maturin, leading her to a couch.

Drawing the girl down beside her, she presses the little soft shiny head against her bosom and seeks to soothe her with tenderest words.

Not in vain. The voice of her who from her earliest infancy has ministered to her wants brings balm to the wounded soul of Dolores. Growing calmer presently, she gives Miss Maturin a condensed account of her flight, her illness, and the unspeakable kindness of Mr. Mildmay.

'I must thank him!' exclaims Miss Maturin, rising hurriedly from her seat as the broken voice comes to an end.

'Come with me, then,' says Dolores, rising too. 'I long to make you known to him—my friend—my preserver!'

'God bless him wherever he goes!' murmurs Miss Maturin, in a low tone full of intense feeling. She tightens her hand upon the girl's, as it lies lovingly within hers, and follows her across the tiny hall to Mr. Mildmay's study. Here it was he had received Bouverie—here too he is destined to meet Dolores's aunt.

With an eager step Miss Maturin crosses the threshold—with an eager, tearful smile she goes forward to greet her darling's friend. He is sitting in his usual chair, as she and Dolores enter the room; he rises, their eyes meet.

There is a smothered ejaculation from somewhere, and then the pleasant smile dies from Miss Maturin's face, the light from her eyes. She looks as though she had been suddenly touched into marble by some invisible hand, as she stands there motionless, her gaze immovably fixed upon Mr. Mildmay with a horror in it indescribable.

As for Mr. Mildmay, from the moment his glance met hers, a terrible change has passed over him. He is watching her with a strained half-unbelieving air, his face blanched, his hands trembling. In his whole appearance there is a curious sense of fear, vague but unmistakable.

'You!' breathes Miss Maturin, at last.

Her voice is not loud, there is no violent passion in it. It is indeed low. Almost in a whisper the one word falls from her, yet it thrills through all the room.

'Lallie,' murmurs Dolores, affrightedly, touching her, as though to demand her attention. Very timidly she lays her hand upon her arm; but for the first time in all her life—and the last—Miss Maturin repulses her.

'Have you been living under this man's roof?' she asks, in a voice no one would recognise as hers, so harsh it is, and filled with so condensed a hatred—the hatred of a lifetime. 'You have eaten of his bread! Did instinct tell you nothing, girl? *Speak!*'

'Tell me what?' asks Dolores, faintly. 'Oh, Dick, come here!'—as Bouverie walks into the room through the glass door opening into the garden. 'There is something wrong,' cries she, a little wildly. 'I do not understand. Who—who

——' She pauses, and points breathlessly to Mr. Mildmay. 'Who is this?'

'*Your father!*' returns Miss Maturin, in a cold, measured tone.

Bouverie places his arm round the half-sinking girl. But in a moment she rallies from her weakness, and rushes forward as though to throw herself into Mr. Mildmay's arms. All is forgotten—the shame, the disgrace of her birth—she remembers only that her father stands before her, that she has found a parent in the man who had so tenderly shielded her when the world frowned.

'Stay, Dolores,' cries Miss Maturin, seizing her as she would have passed by and forcibly detaining her. 'Have you forgotten *all*?'

Mr. Mildmay, pale as death, advances a step or two, and lifts his hand as though to command a hearing.

'*Her father!*' he exclaims, with difficulty. 'What strange tale are you telling her? A father? *I*? Nay, through your own lips I condemn you. I have no daughter. She died when——'

'She lived!' interrupts Miss Maturin, sternly. 'She stands before you now; but I adjure you, for your soul's sake, to keep back from her, to break all connection between you. Think of her mother, *think!*'

'Have mercy!' murmurs Dolores, with soft but passionate entreaty, as she marks how the old man's head has fallen forward on his hands as that mention of the dead was made.

'Did *he* show mercy?' demands Miss Maturin, turning almost fiercely upon the gentle pleader. 'And are *you* the one to crave pardon for him? I tell you, you should rather *curse* him,' cries she, vehemently—'that man who stands there now cowering before you—the traitor who destroyed the one who loved and trusted him! Curse him, girl—I desire you!'

'Oh, no, no, *no!*' whispers Dolores, shuddering convulsively.

'The bitterest curse you could lay upon him would be too light,' persists the elder woman, carried away by a passion grown strong and irrepressible by the suppression of many years. 'Your mother he ruined body and soul; and now, you, he would ruin too. Call to mind all he has done for you—*he*, your father! Has he not killed for you all chance of love and hope and joy? Truly—with a scornful laugh—'he has been your best friend! Show him no mercy—none!' cries she, with

increasing horror ; 'but call for Heaven's vengeance on him, lest he escape again !'

'I cannot,' cries Dolores, falling upon her knees and covering her face with her hands. 'He is—my father !'

'You had a mother too,' Miss Maturin reminds her, in a low tone full of concentrated bitterness. 'Is *her* blighted memory nothing to you ? Am I—alone—to be the one to remember her and her wrongs this day ?'

She draws back from the kneeling girl, as though resigning her, and raises her eyes to heaven.

'Ah, do not forsake me, Lallie !' implores Dolores, pitifully. 'My heart is torn in twain ! He has been very good to me, and see—see'—pointing to Mr. Mildmay—'how pale he looks and how despairing !'

'Who is this child ?' asks Mr. Mildmay, in a hollow voice, indicating Dolores.

'Yours,' returns his adversary, icily.

'You told me she was dead,' says Mr. Mildmay, a sudden sharp colour tinging his pale features. 'You swore it. How am I to believe you now ?'

'To save her from you I lied. Don't think I shrink from this avowal,' exclaims she, eagerly. 'Be assured rather that I glory in it. I would have perjured myself at any time and thought it a good deed, if by so doing I could have saved that angel there from the contamination of your presence. I would gladly have laid her in her innocent grave rather than resign her to your care—you who destroyed her mother !'

'Hear me !' says Mr. Mildmay, coming forward with a certain dignity in his bearing though his lips are trembling and his face is ashen grey. 'Is secrecy so foul a crime ? Her mother'—pointing out Dolores by an almost imperceptible gesture—'was to me as a saint from heaven ! I lived but for her ; I had no thought that I wronged her and her child so irretrievably as you say I did when I induced her to consent to—a *private marriage* !'

'Marriage !' The word breaks from Dolores with a low cry. Her first thought is for her lover. She runs to him—straight into his arms and nestles there. Not for a moment does she doubt the blessed truth. Now she may give herself to him *sans peur et sans reproche* ; now she may have and hold him as her own, for ever and ever !

'How—what is this ? What am I to understand ?' Mr. Mildmay is stammering feebly.

Then all at once the truth flashes across his mind, and he colours deeply as a girl might, and turns his large surprised gaze upon Miss Maturin.

'Can it be, madam,' he asks, in a trembling tone of keenest reproach, 'that you have so wronged in thought that sinless creature now lying in her grave?'—all thought of himself is forgotten.

'Sir,' says Miss Maturin, in a broken voice, 'if you can prove to me that I have wronged her, I shall feel that no punishment is heavy enough for me to bear; but I shall know also that you have made me the happiest being upon earth!'

For all answer he unlocks a drawer near him and hands to her in silence a folded paper—a paper yellowed and soiled by years, but unmistakably a marriage certificate. She is so agitated, her eyes are so dim with tears, that she can only be sure of so much. All is blurred and indistinct.

'There was a marriage, then?' exclaims Bouverie, with strong excitement, laying his hand upon Mr. Mildmay's arm. 'Speak!'

'What is there to say?' asks the old man, bewildered. 'We were married—yes. That paper there will tell you so. It was my fault solely that we hid the marriage. There were reasons—worldly reasons—then—that suggested the necessity for concealment. I would now with all my soul that such reasons had not found weight with me, but *she* was in no wise to blame.'

'Is it true? *Can* it be true, after all these years?' gasps Miss Maturin, piteously. 'Oh, all these miserable years! But even now I fear to believe——' A shiver passes over her, and then a more trustful look gleams in her dark eyes. She turns away from them, she seems to have forgotten their presence. She clasps her hands with a fervid gesture. 'She is saved!' she murmurs, brokenly. 'My child, my *beloved*!'

Dolores, creeping up to her, slips her hand timidly around her neck.

'Dear Lallie,' she whispers, softly, 'now I may love my father, may I not?'

With a return of the old graceful elasticity that was one of her many charms, she moves swiftly across the room, and throws herself into her father's arms. Tenderly he embraces her.

'Ah,' she says, presently, lifting her head and smiling

through her soft dewy eyes, 'now I am no longer Dolores Lorne—I am Dolores Mildmay.'

'No,' returns her father, gravely—'*Dolores Bouverie!*'

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

Nothing is better, I well think,  
Than love; the hidden well-water  
Is not so delicate to drink.

SWINBURNE.

THERE is an astonished pause. Dolores, glancing involuntarily at her lover, blushes warmly. As for Bouverie, he laughs aloud.

'Dolores Bouverie,' he repeats, addressing Mr. Mildmay, 'not quite yet, but certainly as soon as ever we can manage it.'

'No—at this present moment,' returns the old man, quietly. '*My* name is Bouverie. I have reason to think, sir'—regarding Dick reflectively—'that in you I see a nephew.'

'I am afraid you err a little there,' says Dick. 'The only uncle I ever had fell over a precipice in Switzerland, and was never heard of after.'

'You hear of him now,' says Mr. Mildmay. 'The fall from that precipice was but a poor affair when all is told, yet it served my purpose. It helped me to bury myself out of sight of a world that had grown distasteful to me. When I picked myself off the ledge of the rock on which most providentially I had fallen, and found my guides had disappeared in no doubt the full certainty of having been present at my death, I determined to be dead from that day forward so far as my people were concerned. I took another name, the name you know me by, and for eighteen years I have lived a hermit's life.'

'But, sir, what had my—*your* people done that you should so blot yourself from their remembrance?' asks the young man, with some vehemence.

'They were part of an unhappy past—a past from which I have never been able to dissever myself. But for my uncle's whim, that would have driven me into marriage with a woman I abhorred on pain of being disinherited, I could have openly

married this child's mother'—laying his hand upon Dolores's shoulder, who is gazing into his face with large expectant eyes. 'The title should by law come to me in course of time ; but very little of the property was entailed, and what there was of it would be of small use to me in the keeping up of the old name. He, the late baronet, was my guardian as well as my uncle, and I was his presumed heir.'

He pauses, as though overcome by some vague recollections.

'Go on !' says Miss Maturin, nervously.

'He pressed upon me this marriage with an arrogant heiress, until, to avoid his importunities, I left my house, and, knapsack at my back, wandered into the Northern counties. My love of painting drove me ever onward to the bold rocky coasts that border Scotland. To escape farther from him and his plan, and to place it out of his power to persecute me with letters on the same distasteful subject, I changed my name and travelled everywhere through the towns and villages under an assumed cognomen.

'So travelling, I found *her*—my fate ! Of that I need say no more. I loved her ; she loved me. We cared not for consequences. Yet I could not bring myself altogether to disregard the chance of gaining an inheritance that might enable me to give to the woman I adored all those luxuries that go so far to sweeten life.

'I confided in her, I told her all ; I described to her the hard, narrow-minded, obstinate old man who was seeking to force me into a detested bondage. She consented to fly with me, to submit to a private marriage, to give herself in effect as absolutely to me as any lover's soul could desire. I rewarded her with all I had—the ungrudging devotion of my whole heart ! Ah, those happy hours !'

As though lost in recollection of a time when youthful ecstasy and divine rapture alone filled his days, the old man ceases speaking and gazes with rapt eyes upon the faded garden outside.

'Well, father ?' asks Dolores, touching his shoulder gently, and so compelling his return to earth.

'Yes, yes, I must finish,' murmurs he, with the long-drawn sigh of one newly awakened from a pleasant trance. 'When you, my child, were about to be born, your mother grew delicate. She pined a little, and at last I suggested to her change. She grasped at the thought, and went with me willingly to a small village in Brittany. Hardly was I there, when I re-



ceived a letter from our faithful servant, Mrs. Edgeworth, then a young girl and my wife's maid, telling me of my uncle's approaching death and forwarding to me letters desiring my presence at his bedside.

'How could I go? Your mother'—all through he has addressed himself to Dolores—'comprehending how I suffered, being thus torn in two between my desire to be with her and my fear of losing all that I had striven so hard to retain, urged me to go to England and present myself to my dying uncle. She had never felt better—she declared earnestly—than now she felt, and why should we risk losing all for the sake of a mere cowardly fear? And baby, he—she had all along persuaded herself that it would be a boy—would suffer more than either of us if disinheritance were to follow on my refusal to visit the old man's sick-bed.

'I went to find my uncle lying sick, nigh unto death, but fully alive as to his affairs. He seemed to find pleasure in my presence, and from day to day kept me near him, occupied with law-papers, signing my name to this and condemning that and so on. A wearisome waiting! The days grew into weeks; and at last there came a time when the letters from my wife grew fewer, and then ceased altogether.

'A horrible sense of nervous horror overcame me. I made some wild excuse to my uncle, and left England again to seek the town in Brittany that contained for me all that made life worth having. Alas, it no longer contained it! I arrived to find my house left unto me desolate. She—my wife—was dead—nay, buried! Every hope I had was quenched within that hour. I no longer lived; my being sank into the grave with her, there to find the only rest it has ever since known—until to-day!'

His hand seeks Dolores's, and rests there.

'I found that, at the very last, she had telegraphed to her sister—not so much in fear of death as to have some woman she loved near her during the hour of her coming trial. To me she had sent no message, dreading lest she should do me injury with the churlish old man by drawing me from him when he most needed me. She knew that no earthly consideration would have held me from her then—had I only known!'

His voice breaks, and it is some moments before he can proceed.

'She was gone from me—dead! Nothing was left! A

child had been born, they said ; but a strange lady had taken it away with her, and had left no address behind, no name, no sign by which a clue to her dwelling-place might be discovered. But that she was English was beyond all doubt. All that had happened then became clear to me. I left France, and sought—you !’

Here he turns his eyes fully upon Miss Maturin, who is sitting motionless, scarce breathing, with down-bent head.

‘You,’ continues he, his voice sinking almost to a whisper, ‘refused to see me. With my heart freshly torn and bleeding from my late cruel, incurable wound, you drove me from your door ! I was not so to be repulsed ; I returned again and again, always to receive the same imperturbable reply. I demanded news of my child, of that last frail link that still bound me to the sweet saint that had soared so far above me. A cold abrupt message came to me, saying the child was dead. What then was left to me ? I broke off all connection with this country and went abroad.

‘Who shall blame me if there I courted death in many a form, if I sought thus to obtain oblivion from the griefs that each hour seemed to make more keen ? Vainly I endeavoured to gain the peace only to be known by those who have deliberately renounced the world by separating themselves from it. Of all who had once known me, to Mrs. Edgeworth alone I gave my confidence, and in her I was not mistaken ; she has been to me a true and loyal friend from that hour until now.’

He ceases speaking, as though half unconsciously, and sits gazing absently into space, with Dolores’s hand still held tightly between both his own. Miss Maturin, with the tears running down her cheeks, rises from her chair and goes up to him.

‘I have indeed misjudged you,’ she confesses, brokenly. ‘I have wronged her too—my innocent girl ! Even when she lay dead within my arms I wronged her ! But her gentle spirit has forgiven me long ere this. For your forgiveness, sir, I dare not ask !’

‘You kept the child from me,’ cries he, in great agitation ; ‘in that thought lies the deepest sting ! All these years you have robbed me of what would have meant to me life indeed—the possession of a treasure such as this !’

Softly, caressingly, he lays his hand upon Dolores’s sunny head as it lies upon his breast. But at his touch—or is it at his words ?—the girl starts into life.

'You must not blame Lallie,' she exclaims, vehemently ; 'no unkind thing must be said to *her*—remember that !'

She shrinks in part from him, and holds out her hands to Miss Maturin—to her who has been her life's mother, and who can never now be supplanted in the first place in her affections.

'She kept from me the only sunshine that could have gladdened my sad hours,' says Mr. Mildmay—or rather Sir Richard Bouverie—in a stern tone—'that is, yourself !'

'Am I so much to be blamed ?' demands Miss Maturin, passionately, stepping back a little and speaking as one might who is addressing an imaginary audience, a jury who is to decide upon her life or death. 'What could I think ?'

'No one shall blame you, Lallie,' exclaims the girl, softly, leaving her father's embrace to run to Miss Maturin and fling her arms lovingly around her—'no one, whilst I am present !'

'It was such a cruel mistake,' says Miss Maturin, sobbing, but holding the pretty slight form eagerly to her breast—'cruel to me as well as to her ! Listen, sir !' she cries again, addressing Sir Richard. 'When I found my sister dying—nay, dead—there was upon her hand no wedding-ring. Like a flash of unalterable truth it came to me that what I had dreaded all along was true. Ah, what terrible hours that false belief has given me ! As I have already said, I wronged her, and for my fault I have been justly punished. Be merciful to me now, I beseech you,' she murmurs gently, thinking, with bitter remembrance, upon her life-long grief, upon her many lost hours when happiness might have been possible to her but for this slur upon her darling's birth.

'The ring ! It must have been stolen then from her poor hand,' declares Sir Richard, with pale lips. 'But'—turning again to Miss Maturin—'had time no power to soften you ? Did you never think that a father had some right in his child ?'

'Believing what I then believed, I thought a total separation from all matters connected with her unholy birth the one thing to be desired. I took her ; I said I would be a mother to her, in place of that poor lost one. To her,' cries Miss Maturin, flinging out her hands towards Dolores, 'I leave it to say if I have fulfilled my trust.'

'Lallie !' cries the girl, pathetically, trying to reach her ; but Miss Maturin waves her back.

'Nay, satisfy him ; do me justice !' she exclaims, her voice vibrating with emotion.

'I will,' murmurs the girl, tenderly. Then she turns to her father. 'It is enough,' she says, fervently, 'to tell you that in all the years I have spent with her I never once remembered that I was motherless.'

'Yes, she has been indeed a mother to your child,' interposes Bouverie, eagerly.

Sir Richard starts slightly as the young man speaks. Perhaps he had forgotten his presence; now, however, he turns to him.

'You see,' he says graciously, 'as I told you, I have to-day regained not only a daughter, but a nephew.'

'A nephew?' The young man repeats his words vaguely, as though absent or puzzled. 'It is all so confusing,' he says, breaking off with a curious laugh, but paling perceptibly, 'to think that you—you should be Dolores's father!'

Miss Maturin, who has been scarcely listening, turns now to the elder man.

'If you are Richard Bouverie,' she says, slowly, as though following out a train of troublesome thought, 'why, then you are the elder son; to you the baronetcy belongs—you are Sir Richard!'

'So it might be,' returns he, dreamily. 'But I have given up the world; it is no longer anything to me, and why should I disturb others? A title has long since ceased to have an attraction for me.'

'But now!—now that you have a daughter, Bouverie,' cries Miss Maturin, eagerly, 'your child, surely, is worthy of all thought. You must rouse, assert yourself, and give yourself to the world again under your right name, if only for her sake—hers! Come forth, I tell you, from your obscurity—it is your duty—and lift the cloud that hangs over her young life. You must claim your title, your home, your position!'

Dolores turns upon her a glance of agonised reproach.

As for Dick, he has been standing quite apart, his head lowered. Perhaps he alone has quite understood what a terrible change this news has made to him. From being heir to a large property he has suddenly dwindled into a very poor young man indeed, without a profession, without a hope of ever rising out of an unenviable mediocrity, and with a title that, like all barren honours, will ever hang as a mill-stone round his neck.

And she, his cousin, will be heir to the money and estates—very little of either is entailed—without which the title would be but an empty vaunt. And of the title even can he

be sure ? His uncle may marry again. Why should he not ? And Dolores—Dolores ! He clutches his hands. Poor as he is, they could not be cruel enough to take her from him *now*—to look for a higher alliance to which her sweetness and beauty might well entitle her—to take her from his very arms !

‘Dick,’ whispers a soft little voice—‘Dick, look at me !’ She steals her slender fingers into his, and compels him to return her tender glance. ‘Dear father,’ she says, addressing Sir Richard over her shoulder, ‘if *you* get all, what is to become of Dick ?’

‘Your husband will be my son,’ returns he, sententiously.

‘And—and Lady Bouverie ?’ asks the girl, nervously.

‘Tush !’ exclaims Miss Maturin, bitterly. ‘One in this case is bound to go to the wall ; who is fitter to be sent there than she ?’

‘Ah, poor Lady Bouverie ?’ cries Dolores, a strange quiver desolating her voice ; her lips grow sad with grief. ‘*Must* she suffer ?’ All remembrance of her late unhappiness and the cause of it seems obliterated from her mind ; she can see only Dick’s mother in direst trouble, torn from the high position that has been more to her than life and its affections. She grows sorely distressed ; her eyes run over suddenly with bright hot tears.

‘Surely charity never faileth !’ murmurs Miss Maturin ; and then aloud—‘Come here to me, you most sweet angel !’ she cries, holding out her arms to Dolores. ‘How could any evil thought dwell in the same place with you ? For your dear sake, then, we will give that cold-hearted woman one more chance of redeeming herself from the charge of utter heartlessness ; but enough now. You are overstrung, my darling, by all these discoveries, and so is your father ; another time we will decide upon the measures to be pursued ; but for to-day, no more. Dick, take her into the fresh air for a little while.’

\* \* \* \* \*

But Dick, when he has taken her there, is still very sad and silent. For a little while she watches him furtively, and then—

‘Are you sorry I have supplanted you ?’ she asks, her voice vibrating with gentle agitation.

‘I am sorry that I have now nothing to offer you.’

‘Oh, Dick, are you going to tell me then that your love is

no longer mine?' asks she, with a careful pretence at a belief in her own accusation.

'Not that—never that! But everything is so changed; you have all, I have nothing!'

'Well, I can't see it in that light,' exclaims she, with sudden sprightliness. 'I was always an heiress, Dick, and you had always a title in perspective. I can't see, then, how things are so terribly changed as you would make out.'

'An empty title is of small account,' says Dick, gloomily. 'It seems horribly selfish of me to keep you now to an engagement that cannot advantage you in any way.'

'You are not keeping me.'

Dick regards her with a sudden fear.

'I thought perhaps you might still feel yourself bound to——'

'Not in the least bound. I feel free as air!' declares Miss Bouverie, blowing a little dainty kiss from the tips of her fingers to Miss Maturin, who had appeared for a moment at an open window and then vanished.

'You don't mean to tell me,' exclaims Dick, turning upon her fiercely, 'that you mean to throw me over now?'

Dolores breaks into a merry, heartfelt laugh.

'Ah, Dick, you were never meant to tread the boards,' cries she, saucily; 'your acting is not up to the mark at all. Why, you forgot all about your part when the tragic moment arrived. Now confess that, in spite of all your silly pretending, you would not give me up for the world.'

'Not for a thousand worlds!' returns Dick, laughing; and after that there is never any further mention made of a desire to resign her to any wandering duke or reigning prince, who, coming that way, may chance to be enraptured by her charms. But, just before they go in, a slight mention is made of another topic altogether.

'I think we ought to get married as soon as ever we can,' says Bouverie, with quite a business-like air.

'Well—perhaps so,' returns she. Her hesitation is quite as slight as I have made it here appear.

'I shall never be quite happy until I get you into my own possession,' goes on Dick, when sundry lover-like technicalities have been gone through. 'I feel now always as if I dare hardly take my eyes off you, lest I should lose you again. Even when you are my wife, I know I shall never let you out of my sight.'

'Do you hope I shall run away from you, then?' asks she,

pinching his ear. 'Are you counting upon *that* as a sure way of getting rid of me? Don't. There isn't a chance for you there. I shall stay with you just as long as you live.'

'I wish I could live for ever,' says Dick.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

But you, most perfect in your hate !

Take in season

Thought with reason,

Think what gifts are ours for giving.

SWINBURNE.

'A LETTER from that woman at Greylands,' sneers Lady Bouverie, throwing the missive in question, with a contemptuous gesture, to her younger son.

'She has returned, then?'

'So it seems.'

'Any news of——' He runs his eyes lightly over the paper. 'To go to Greylands as soon as you can conveniently manage—odd—eh? I hope she has not got to communicate to you the news of that poor child's death.'

'I hope she has,' returns his mother, coldly; 'though why to *me*? What have I to do with the living or the dying of her disreputable relatives?'

'On Dick's account.'

'Richard and I have no interests in common,' returns she, icily. 'He has chosen to renounce me and join himself to those whom it would be a disgrace even to know. Let him abide by his choice.'

'When a man is in love,' begins Bruno, earnestly, 'he hardly calculates the whys and wherefores. You should remember that he——'

'I remember nothing, except that he has elected to cast in his lot with people who have wilfully withdrawn his allegiance from his mother. But'—with a touch of anger—'that is not the subject in hand.'

'No. You will go to Greylands?'

'Why should I? What an impertinence, her summoning *me* to her presence!' She rises as though involuntarily to her

feet, and her fingers close with a remarkable clench upon a fold of her gown. She stands thus looking into space for a moment or so, and then her humour changes. 'After all,' she says, reflectively, 'I think I shall go. Her asking me to visit her at Greylands is hardly so supreme an insolence as would be her attempting to force an entrance here into my own house—adventuress that she is. Has she tired, then, of my son—is he no longer of any use to her now that the girl is dead?'

'Her death is a mere supposition on my part,' Bruno reminds her hastily, a shade of intensest feeling crossing his face. But Lady Bouverie is not attending to him.

'Yes, I shall go,' she says, 'if only to let her know how thoroughly *en rapport* I am with her manœuvres.'

'If anything has happened to Dolores it will be a death-blow to her,' says Bruno, rising from his seat in some agitation. 'I implore you to be gentle with her.'

Lady Bouverie shuts up her fan with a little vicious click, and lets a curious smile widen her lips for a moment.

'And now too,' goes on Bruno, nervously—'*now*—when Dick must be in such sore grief, if my surmise prove correct—will be the time to regain his affection. A little kindly word—a word of sympathy dropped when the heart is wounded, does more good than——'

'Is it a prescription?' asks his mother, with a little cruel laugh. 'My dear Bruno, you should have been an open-air preacher! But, even if you do mean to coach for that lofty position, I must beg that at least you will be good enough not to practise upon me your maiden efforts at goody-goody eloquence. Spare me at least that.'

'I was only suggesting to you a proper line of conduct,' replies Bruno, coldly. He speaks now without an attempt at the conciliatory manner of a moment since. A vague affection for her, mingled with a sense of duty, has held him true to her up to this. There has been no dependence upon her, as he became heir to a considerable property upon the death of a distant cousin almost as he entered on his twenty-second year.

'Do you imagine I want to win back Richard?' demands his mother, angrily. 'Understand me now, once for all. I have *done with him*. I no longer regard him as a son. From his earliest infancy he was antagonistic to me—now,' with a sudden change of tone that is full of a concentrated and most bitter dislike, 'he is insufferable.'

'Still he is your son—your child.'



‘And “blood is thicker than water,”’ interrupts she, contemptuously, ‘that is what you would quote to me. So it is. It is capable of holding more hatred, more accumulated contempt, than any such weak thing as water. Cease your support of Richard, it carries no weight with it. Let him cling to the woman who, with the aid of a pretty base-born face, enticed him from his allegiance to his mother!’ She makes a movement towards the bell, and then checks herself. ‘Order the carriage,’ she says, peremptorily, as though longing to drive him from her presence on any pretext.

‘Bless my stars, what a volcano she is!’ mutters Bruno, with a deep breath of relief as he quits the room.

As Lady Bouverie enters the morning-room at Greylands, Miss Maturin rises to receive her. In doing so she happens to pull one of the lace curtains of the upper window a little apart, so that Lady Bouverie’s sharp eyes suddenly become aware of the presence of a man who is walking, with solemn tread and slow, up and down upon the balcony outside. The curtain has fallen back into its usual folds before she has gained sufficient knowledge of the figure to know if it be friend or foe. But of one thing she assures herself, it is not Richard.

‘You wished to speak to me?’ she says to Miss Maturin, when she has made her the slightest and most distant salutation.

‘Yes. About my niece—about Dolores.’

‘Ah!’ says Lady Bouverie.

By an insolent uplifting of her brows she gives Miss Maturin to understand that the proposing to her such a subject is almost an insult.

‘There have been many and great changes since last I saw you. We have discovered her father,’ goes on Miss Maturin, with a painful effort. She would have liked to say more, but words fail her. She grows almost dumb in the presence of this cold, haughty woman, as she thinks on what the declaration of her secret will mean to her.

‘I really fail to see why I should be expected to find an interest in the discovery of that very disreputable person,’ returns Lady Bouverie, with icy distinctness.

‘It makes a difference,’ begins Miss Maturin.

‘A sorry one. So far as I can judge about such an unpleasant affair, I should say that the appearance on the scene of so disgraceful a parent would be but another shame to hang round the neck of that unfortunate girl, your niece.’

'He will not shame her,' says Miss Maturin, in a low voice, her eyes on the ground.

Lady Bouverie shrugs her shoulders.

'I merely gave you my opinion,' she replies, indifferently. 'I did not expect you to think *with* me. Of course it is disagreeable mixing oneself up with a low affair of this kind, even in the most delicate way; but when you seemed in such want of advice, I felt it my duty to waive a point or two and let you have it.' She half rises from her seat. 'Anything else?' she asks, in a tone of ineffable impertinence.

'One moment,' persists Miss Maturin. 'I have said there will be no shame attached to her through her father. I repeat it now. Many things have come to light—beyond and above everything the fact that my sister was married to the man who loved her. Dolores is honourably born!'

'Yes?' says Lady Bouverie, in the polite tone of one who is inexpressibly bored. She is still standing, as though eager to grasp at a decent chance of taking her departure. 'Yes?'

The word is a question. The manner repudiates the word altogether, and gives Miss Maturin to understand that she hopes sincerely she *won't* answer it. But Miss Maturin declines to notice her manner.

'Well,' she repeats, firmly, 'as things are now so altered, as Dolores is proved to be of birth honest as your own, I have asked you to come here, to know if you will not take pity upon her and your son, and sanction an engagement between them.'

'Why should I sanction it?'

'Because of their love,' says Miss Maturin, in a trembling voice.

'You must be mad,' declares Lady Bouverie, in a low, measured tone, 'to even dream of such a successful ending to your scandal. To give consent to the marriage of my son with a girl whose name has been a by-word in the neighbourhood, who has indeed been held up to contempt by the entire county, whose father doubtless is a man of such obscure origin that you shrank from associating her with him, and held him aloof until circumstances compelled you to produce him, if only to save a deeper disgrace! No! Rather first would I see my son within his grave!'

'Listen, madam——'

'I will not! You may cajole him into marrying her (that I cannot prevent)—you have been, so far, so successful

in rendering him undutiful to his parents, that I can well believe your genius for intrigue will enable you to carry him that step farther; but my consent to this most iniquitous match you shall never have!

'You distinctly decline, then, to befriend your son in this matter?' asks Miss Maturin, calmly, who has given no acknowledgment of the insults offered her save the growth of a sudden pallor that has spread from cheek to brow. 'Think, madam, before it is too late. Clemency, even at the last moment, would be accepted—would restore the former relations existing between you.'

As though a shadow has fallen upon her, Lady Bouverie becomes aware that the silent figure outside upon the balcony has here come to a standstill near the open window. Is he listening? Can it be Richard after all? The evil spirit within her rises high at the thought. If he is there, let him take her answer.

'I think you mistake this affair,' she says, with a slight smile full of contemptuous scorn. 'I am surely not the one to take the initiative in it. A rebellious son—such as you have made Richard—should be taught to crawl to my knees'—pointing to her feet with fingers tremulous with passion—'before I would grant him pardon! And, as to the clemency you speak of, why should I so wrong him as to show it? I consider a marriage with the girl you call your niece would be the ruin of *any* man—I hope I have made myself quite clear!'

'Quite clear,' returns Miss Maturin.

'Do you know what the world is saying of your niece?' goes on Lady Bouverie, turning upon her adversary with the first touch of open anger and triumph she has as yet shown—'of a girl who was bold enough to quit the shelter of her home and wander alone unguarded through the streets of London? Have you heard? Truly, her bad blood is betraying itself.'

'There is no bad blood,' begins Miss Maturin, faintly; but the angry woman will not listen to her.

'Find consolation in *nothing*, if you will,' she says, with a short laugh. 'But, pray tell me, has she satisfied *you* as to where and how she spent her time from the hour she left you until she chose to be discovered again? A month is a long time. A month in London, with no possible means of support—*decent* means—is an inconveniently lengthy period to spend *incognita*.'

'May Heaven forgive you!' replies Miss Maturin, very slowly and very solemnly. 'As yet I cannot. The evening of the day my poor child left my home—driven into exile by your taunts—she found a resting-place beneath her father's roof.'

'Ah, so! Then she knew of his existence in spite of all we have been so carefully taught to the contrary? I must compliment her upon her diplomatic powers. To be so young, yet so skilled in the art of deception, deserves a public recognition.'

'Oh, no, no!' exclaims Miss Maturin, putting up her hands as though to ward off from her the odious suspicions of the other. 'She knew nothing. We all believed him dead. It was the care of a most merciful Providence—who never fails us in our need—that drove her into his arms. I *entreat* you not to wrong her so! She is as a very angel of goodness; deception is unknown to her. The discovery of her father was almost a miracle.'

'Miracles nowadays are somewhat out of fashion,' says Lady Bouverie, with a cold smile.

'That may be; but I beg you to listen to what I have now to tell you about Dolores.'

'Ah, spare me,' exclaims she, insolently, lifting her head and drawing back a little, as though imploring Miss Maturin not to subject her to a certain boredom. 'I have already listened to so many details of the—er—*remarkable* history of your niece's life that I must really beg you to keep from me anything further. You must not think me rude. I assure you I feel myself quite unequal to the comprehending of any more horrors. I am far from strong. Such coarse allusions to the vices of the lower classes are very distressing.'

'I fear you will *have* to listen to me whether you will or no,' says Miss Maturin, coldly. 'Her father—'

'Of him I will *not* hear!' exclaims Lady Bouverie, biting her lips and growing white with indignation. 'I shall not submit to insult. I confess I was not prepared for insolence when I foolishly decided upon acceding to your wish to see me here to-day.'

'Nevertheless, the truth must be told to you,' declares Miss Maturin, unmoved. 'Hear it now, I advise you—'

She would have said more; but that at this instant the door is thrown open, and Dick, with Dolores, enters the room.

'I have told your mother all—all but the very last, Dick,'

cries Miss Maturin, with vehement emotion. 'But she will not hear me. Speak to her, you.'

'Mother,' exclaims Bouverie, advancing towards her, 'for the last time I entreat you to receive Dolores as your daughter.'

'And for the last time—as I *hope*,' returns she, bitterly, 'I refuse!'

'I tell you—I *warn* you, you will repent it for ever, if you now persist in your decision,' says Bouverie, sternly. 'I give you one more chance; I again ask you to listen to her pleading and mine.'

'Ah, madam!' murmurs Dolores, drawing near to her, her soft eyes, suffused with tears, fixed longingly upon the remorseless features before her. Her appeal is almost a sigh, it is so low, so timid; but her glance is eloquence itself.

'I still refuse,' persists Lady Bouverie, disdainfully waving the girl back from her, as though fearing contamination from her gentle touch. 'Nay, more,' she exclaims, suddenly facing Dick, 'I refuse to acknowledge you any longer as my son. I discard you!' She pauses to look at him with flashing eyes. 'Go,' she continues in a stifled tone, 'and connect yourself with these people who are without shame as they are without merit!'

The young man, turning white with anger steps back from her and involuntarily places his arm round the shrinking form of Dolores. Indignation renders him dumb. He appeals to Miss Maturin with his eyes. By an adroit movement she intercepts Lady Bouverie's advance to the door.

'Since all entreaty has failed,' she says, in a low tone, 'hear the worst. Dolores's father is——' She hesitates, some sudden emotion checks her utterance; and before she can recover herself, the man who has been walking up and down upon the balcony outside enters the room. He parts the lace curtains with both hands and stands motionless, looking fixedly upon Lady Bouverie.

'Richard!' A sharp cry comes from her lips. 'Richard Bouverie!' The words die from her, a ghastly pallor overspreads her face, she clings to the nearest chair as if for support. It is she who has concluded Miss Maturin's speech and declared aloud Dolores's parentage.

'Yes, it is I,' says Richard Bouverie

'That story about Switzerland, then, was feigned. It was a mere *canard*!'

It is with difficulty she forces these words from between her white lips.

'Yes,' returns he again. She looks so haggard, so utterly discomfited, that he finds it impossible to add to her dismay, to reproach her in any way.

Something in the silence, in the lowered faces around her, touches her arrogant spirit and rouses it to fury. Throwing up her head with haughty gesture, she turns her gaze full upon her son.

'So,' she says, with a low insulting laugh, 'you have secured yourself, I see. The ruin of your family will not touch *you*. The world will deem you clever!'

'My world is here!' returns the young man, in a tone as haughty as her own, taking Dolores's hand in his. 'I do not fear its verdict. And, as for that other world of which you speak, from it too I fear nothing. It knows how I loved and sought Dolores when sorrow was her only portion as dearly as I love and seek her now, when no cloud rests upon her life!'

'Still—I congratulate you!' repeats his mother, with a bitter smile.

She looks steadily round upon them all until her glance meets Miss Maturin; there it rests.

'You have, I presume, no other dramatic points to make?' she says, with a supercilious smile. 'I have, perhaps, your kind permission to retire?'

'Lady Bouverie, do not leave us like this,' exclaims Dolores, starting forward with hands tightly clasped and soft eyes full of tears. 'Consider, I beseech you. Ah! Can *nothing* be done? If I could only think of something that would have power to make you love me!'

'As for you, Richard,' says Lady Bouverie, turning to her brother-in-law and speaking as calmly as though the girl's impassioned appeal had been unheard by her, 'I suppose you will let your brother hear from yourself of your strange resuscitation.'

'My daughter spoke to you,' Sir Richard reminds her, sternly.

'Did she? I did not hear her,' returns she, stonily.

Dolores has fallen back, sobbing, into Miss Maturin's arms. All her innocent efforts have been repulsed—most cruelly slighted! Lady Bouverie moves towards the door, gains it, and passes through it to the ante-room outside. Already she must

have nearly traversed the long halls, must now be near the open door, will soon have crossed the threshold.

'Oh, father, follow her,' cries Dolores, frantically. Do not let her go *alone*. Assure her that we are all her friends, if she will have it so, and not her enemies. Tell her you will divide everything with her! Ah, it is horrible to think that she should lose *all*! Go—go to her!' she entreats, sobbing wildly.

Sir Richard leaves the room.

'Oh, tender heart,' murmurs Miss Maturin, bending over the little trembling figure in her arms.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

And wear remorse of heart for thine attire.

We are vexed and cumbered in earth's sight

With wants, with many memories.

SWINBURNE.

SOFTLY blows the sweet September wind, although the end of this fair month is nearly reached, and chilly October lies crouching on the confines of it. But a little time has passed since last I wrote, yet many have been the changes that have taken place.

The decline and fall of Lady Bouverie, the ascent and rise of Dolores, have been received with widely different feelings by the many in Deadmarsh and the surrounding country. But Audrey Ponsonby, at least, all through had been on the winning side.

She had gone up to Greylands the moment she heard of Dolores's return (knowing nothing of the happy change in her fortune), and had taken the girl into her arms and kissed her with a warmth that had something of solemnity in it. She had said little, but there was a light in her great sombre eyes that convinced Dolores for ever of the reality of the affection she had brought to life within her breast.

Dolores had kissed her back again, smiling through her tears, and then there was whispered to her the great news. It was wonderful, romantic! So Lady Bouverie was not Lady Bouverie, after all! And Dolores—Dolores, the despised one, was to take her place! The poetical justice of it was complete! Miss Ponsonby hurried home to carry the astounding

intelligence to 'Dad,' Dolores standing on the stone steps of the hall-door to wave a last farewell to her as she went up the avenue. Never afterwards did she forget how Audrey had been the very first to come to her, while still believing in the cruel tale that had for a little time cast her young life into shadow.

'Did you ever hear anything more enchanting, Dad?' cried Miss Ponsonby, when she told the story in turn to her father. It has all the sublime satisfaction of a fairy-tale. To think that *her* crest should be lowered!

'Hush, my dear! Remember, it is your aunt of whom you are speaking, over whom indeed you are, as I might say, exulting.'

"'Exulting" is the word,' Miss Ponsonby declared, laughing. 'To have her taken down a peg or two—it is delicious! No dinner for me to-day, I thank you, Dad. I have, I consider, dined most luxuriously off her discomfiture.'

'My dear, you should recollect. It is hardly Christian—eh?'

'Therefore you are the more bound to admire it, if "it" means my appreciation of Madam's downfall. Anything pagan, I know, enlists your sympathies at once. Witness all these musty old tomes over which you are perpetually poring. But the truth now, Dad!' seating herself on his knee and turning up his chin, with her hand. 'I challenge you! Is there not something soothing to the spirit in my news? Ah, *say* there is, or I shan't half enjoy it!'

'Well, she certainly was aggravating in many ways,' confessed the indulgent 'Dad.' 'But yet, my dear, we should not openly rejoice over——'

'Openly—no! But in the bosom of one's large family!' Miss Ponsonby touched her chest lightly. 'Here it is' she said. 'I'm glad, do you know, that I'm *all* the family. I should have been jealous of any companion in your love.'

Mrs. Wemyss, too, had been unaffectedly glad of the girl's return, though somewhat harassed by Bruno, who had shown himself very low-spirited over his mother's changed prospects, when first the discovery of Sir Richard's existence was made known.

But this soon ceased. Sir Richard and his brother met. There was a very joyful recognition between them in spite of all things; and then presently it became known that 'the late' Sir George and his wife were to take possession of a



house belonging to the estate in one of the Northern counties, with an income sufficient to maintain them in very good style, if not altogether in such as they had hitherto been accustomed to. But to the book-loving George Bouverie this change brought few regrets, while his wife, true to the haughty spirit that governed her, said little, and seemed only passionately anxious to hasten her departure from among those who had witnessed her former glories.

Bruno remained behind in the pretty home left him by the will of an ancestor, paying them every now and then short visits, the shorter perhaps in that he finds it a difficulty to tear himself away for any lengthened period from the presence of Mrs. Wemyss.

Of his mother Dick had seen nothing since their parting in the drawing-room at Greylands, but of his father he had taken an affectionate farewell. A sullen animosity that threatens to last for all time exists towards him in the mind of the *ci-devant* Lady Bouverie, an animosity closely copied by her son. But, with the little gentle soul beside him who is so soon to be his life's companion, it is only reasonable to suppose that an amnesty of some sort—if only for his father's sake—will be patched up between them sooner or later.

With Mrs. Drummond and persons of that class dire was the dismay consequent on Dolores's triumph. A sense of utter failure pervaded them. They had resolutely refused to make hay while the sun shone, and now the rain was descending upon them. Too late was their submission, too late the hurrying to and fro and the casting of the offerings at the idol's feet.

A ball was given at Greylands by Miss Maturin, a kind of informal introduction to the county of Sir Richard and his daughter, the young *fiancée*, at which the duchess and all the best people in the neighbourhood had made a point of being present, but for which Miss Maturin had forgotten to send Mrs. Drummond an invitation.

'It appears they mean to cut us,' said Mrs. Drummond afterwards, with an hysterical attempt at hilarity that had been completely thrown away upon her dear friend, Mrs. Dovedale.

That little wily soul had managed to steer clear of all difficulties, and had received her invitation to Miss Maturin's ball, and had talked her suppressed scandal there to her heart's content, and to the intense amusement of Mr. Vyner, but to Mrs. Drummond's everlasting chagrin.

'You are not careful enough,' she had said, in answer to

Mrs. Drummond's hysterical supposition. You are so—er—unpleasantly outspoken.' She somehow here gave the impression that she would have made her adverb 'vulgarly' instead of 'unpleasantly' but for the exigencies of polite converse. 'And you know you *did* say a few unpardonable things of that poor child Dolores.' She said all this deprecatingly, and in her clearest, most fluty tones,

'I said——'

'Yes. *Such* a pity! Anybody might have known she could not possibly be connected with a—er—well anything *fifi*, you know!'

Mrs. Dovedale, with quite a reproachful air, looked straight at her quasi friend as she said this; but that ingenious speech proved just the little bit too much for Mrs. Drummond.

'Bless my soul!' exclaimed that matron, bursting into the florid style that had distinguished her younger and easier days, but which she seldom now allowed herself. 'I've 'eard you yourself say twice the 'orrid things of her that ever *I've* said. Yes, twice! I could swear it if I was put upon my born oath.'

'I'm glad you are not,' said Mrs. Dovedale, sweetly and promptly.

'No doubt,' returned Mrs. Drummond. 'But that won't clear your conscience. I've 'eard you, I tell you; and what I 'ear I remember.'

'You have *heard*!' said Mrs. Dovedale, with the prettiest emphasis upon the missing 'h.' 'Do you know, dear Mrs. Drummond, I sometimes think that of late your memory is not quite all that we could wish it. At least'—hastily, as though fearful of giving offence—'I fancy that you now and then mix up the speeches of your *many* friends, and attribute to one the utterances of another! I have often grieved in secret over these growing lapses of memory of yours! But all this is beside the question. Your breach with Miss Maturin is truly serious, involving as it does a breach with Sir Richard and his charming daughter, our dear Dolores. I confess I never could understand your dislike of her.'

'*Mine*?' began Mrs. Drummond, almost choking with rage.

'Yes, dear. Though her name was Lorne—a strange name here—a fact that *we* county people'—with a glance at the sugar-merchant's daughter that reduced her to powder—are somewhat suspicious about, *I* always liked her. Intuition, I suppose! I *felt* her breeding, and knew instinctively that she

was perfectly all she ought to be. Wonderful how people of the same class recognise each other ; isn't it ?'

The studied impertinence of this speech aroused Mrs. Drummond to a state of frenzy.

'You—you !' she gasped, 'to talk like this ! I wonder you aren't ashamed ! You to up'old that girl and pretend now a friendship for her, when I have often 'eard you say—that——' She paused, more from lack of memory than lack of a desire to continue her accusation.

'Well ? *What ?*' demanded little Mrs. Dovedale, coldly.

'That you thought her the vilest, the most forward minx that ever——'

'Pardon me,' said the vicar's wife, softly. 'But wasn't it *you* who made use of all those coarse expressions ? 'Minx' is a word *I never* use !'

'She was that artful,' said Mrs. Drummond half an hour later, weeping bitterly as she retailed the substance of her interview with Mrs. Dovedale to the disgusted Georgina. '*That* artful, my dear, that there was no having her anywhere ! And after all the ways I've 'elped her, too !'

\* \* \* \* \*

'I think I want to give a little dinner in honour of all these marvellous transformation scenes,' says Mrs. Wemyss, standing on the lawn at Greylands and addressing those around her. 'You will come to me, Miss Maturin, and you, Sir Richard with Dolores ? And you, Miss Ponsonby,' turning gracefully to Audrey, who is talking idly to Sir Chicksy on her right hand.

'I never go anywhere, thank you,' returns Audrey, slowly, letting the late rose-leaves in her hand fall systematically to the earth one by one.

'All the more reason why you should come to me,' returns the pretty widow, brightly ; 'and the Elms is really no distance at all. Though why the "Elms" ? That name is the one unanswerable conundrum I know,' turning to Bruno and laughing gaily. 'It exercises me more than I can say. Was it meant in irony ? Did they give my unfortunate home that name simply because there wasn't an elm within a mile of it ?' Then, with sudden change of tone and figure, that brings her again face to face with Audrey, 'You *will* come, Miss Ponsonby !'

'I really never go anywhere,' persists Audrey, but very gently.

'Except to a duchess or a Dolores,' returns Mrs. Wemyss, laughing. 'Make me your third exception.'

There is something so irresistibly friendly in her manner—her smile—and her little *nez retroussé*, that Audrey hesitates.

'Ah, yes, dear Audrey!' whispers Dolores, slipping her arm through hers.

'Thank you. I shall be very glad to go to you,' says Audrey, impulsively, lifting her head and smiling one of her rare smiles at Mrs. Wemyss.

'So glad she has consented to come to me,' murmurs Mrs. Wemyss, presently, turning to Vyner, who happens to be standing near her. 'She is such a charming girl. I like her more than I can say. Don't you?'

'N-o, not more than I could say.' His tone is disparaging, whatever his words may be.

Mrs. Wemyss glances at him quickly.

'But you *do* like her?' she asks, with pretty persistence.

'Do I?'

'I am asking you the question.'

'Ah—so? Well, now that you compel me to think of it,' says Mr. Vyner, reflectively, 'I don't believe I could honestly make my answer "Yes." No, "like" is not the word.'

'Too weak, perhaps?' suggests Mrs. Wemyss; but she bites her lip slightly and regards him with distinct disappointment.

'Or perhaps too strong.'

'Your taste, then, is not to be depended upon,' exclaims she, with a shrug of her shoulders, casting at him a half-contemptuous glance, that seems to amuse him highly. 'She may seem a little over-reserved and cold, but *au fond* she is worth a dozen of most girls.'

'An ordinary dozen or a baker's dozen?' questions he, teasingly.

'How full of purpose she is, and what a splendid daughter she makes!' goes on Mrs. Wemyss, declining haughtily to notice his frivolous interruption. 'What care she takes of that dear old book-worm! Why, he could not have fewer wants—thanks to her never-ending thoughtfulness—if his small income were treble what it really is! I call her devoted. And just imagine what a cruelty it must be to a girl like her, with her beauty and finish and naturally high aspirations, to be compelled to the perpetual counting of the cost. I can't

think why she doesn't make a good marriage and put an end to it all.'

She pauses, as though in expectation of an answer, or perhaps to take breath.

'Neither can I,' says Vyner, returning her steady gaze in kind. 'A withering contempt for our sex, no doubt. She is—as you say—so very superior.'

'There is Sir Chicksy Chaucer,' continues Mrs. Wemyss, darting a keen glance at him, which he receives with the most admirable fortitude, and then tosses back to her again. 'He has been at her feet, as we all know, for ages—proposes to her once a week without fail, I hear; yet she won't even *look* at him.'

'Ah, that accounts for it,' says Vyner. 'If she did look, you see, she wouldn't be able to refuse him.'

'You may scoff, if you will'—a little warmly; but I can tell you that, after all, he is not so very much to be despised.'

'After *all*—no!'

'His rent-roll is enormous, it would cover a multitude of sins with most women,' says Mrs. Wemyss, a trifle vehemently, as though nettled by his tone. 'And then there is the title. He is as good a match as I know.'

'Excellent! Why don't you have him yourself?' asks Vyner, laughing, who is sufficiently old friends with her to be able to say what he likes.

'Well, she won't have anything to say to him,' continues Mrs. Wemyss, plaintively. 'I call it a clear throwing away of one's opportunities. And if it was *only* Sir Chicksy; but there was—— By-the-by, did you hear of young Drummond's affair!'

'No.'

'I'm not breaking confidence, you will understand, if I tell you; because Georgina and Mrs. Drummond were so furious at any one's daring to refuse their "darling Reggie" that they posted that poor youth's rejection all over the place—could not keep from talking of "that Miss Ponsonby's impertinence!" even to save his blushes.'

'What was he blushing about?'

'Audrey's indignant rejection of his advances. He came down here, you may remember, about a month ago, just before you went up to town, and fell head over ears in love with her. But she would none of him. Foolish girl, say I. He will have a princely fortune by-and-by, a good thing at any time, even

though "grandpapa's" sugar may have helped it. And really, when one could manage to forget the whiteness of poor Reggie's lashes, he wasn't at all a bad young man.'

'My dear Mrs. Wemyss, consider what you are saying. Bad! I have always understood that Reginald Drummond was endowed by a beneficent Nature (as a set-off to his lack of ancestors) with a disposition replete with morality. Don't destroy my fond impressions; don't malign the absent. He is, too, the very image of the good Georgina. I can't tell you how I admire him.'

'Satire is a poor thing,' says Mrs. Wemyss, curling her dainty lip. 'And at all events, I think Audrey is playing fast and loose with very capital chances. A foolish thing—for youth won't last for ever. I wonder'—with another swift glance at him—'why it is she won't marry?'

'Is that a riddle?' asks he, airily. 'If so, I can't help you to a solution of it. It is one that I myself have sought for years to solve in vain.'

'Yet there must be a solution, for all that.'

'I daresay; at any moment it may dawn upon us. I knew people who took in *Vanity Fair*; they called themselves the "Tootsie Wootsies," and they took it in very much indeed! They used to guess all the conundrums straight off. I wish we had them here now, don't you?'

'No, I don't,' returns Mrs. Wemyss, rather wrathfully, 'and I don't see either what they have got to do with Audrey.'

'Oh, no, they haven't anything to do with *her*,' acknowledges Vyner, mildly. 'So far from that, I don't believe she has ever even heard of them. Oh, dear, no. But—talking of Miss Ponsonby—do you know I—I have at last formed an idea.'

'Good heavens!' exclaims Mrs. Wemyss, tragically.

'Now, who is satirical?' reminds he, reproachfully. 'But just listen to me; at this very moment something has occurred to me.'

He squeezes his glass into his eye, and turns upon Mrs. Wemyss a confidential glance. It is so confidential that she warms to it. His voice sinks to a whisper. 'I have it!' he says.

'Ah, you have at last guessed,' cries she, excitedly. She bends forward to receive his belief.

'Yes, at last the truth has suggested itself to me.' He glances cautiously round him, as though afraid of being over-

heard, and then returns his earnest gaze to her. 'Look here,' he says, impressively. 'You take my word for it; she has got her eye on—*Bruno Bouverie*.'

He lets his glass fall. In spite of him, a mischievous laugh falls on the air. Turning abruptly upon his heel, he walks leisurely away.

Mrs. Wemyss, her cheeks a charming red, gazes after his retreating figure; that he is laughing as he goes is apparent to her. After a prolonged observation, she too gives way to a subdued merriment.

'I owe you one for that, Master Anthony!' she says to herself, good-humouredly.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Princess, give ear to this my summary;  
That heart of mine your heart's love should forget,  
Shall never be: like trust in you put I:  
This is the end for which we twain are met.  
She holds my heart in her sweet open hands.

SWINBURNE.

THE dinner at the Elms is a great success. Dinners, of all entertainments, seldom are; but this one at least is all it ought to be. Every one is in the gayest spirits. The women's gowns are exquisitely toned, the wines beyond dispute, the *entrées* hot; what more can be desired? Even Sir Richard has come out of his accustomed reserve, and chats with open interest to his pretty neighbour, who of course happens to be his hostess too.

Dolores is looking radiantly happy. Her eyes are shining, her curled hair, that has

The wave of sea-water  
And the sea's gold in it,

is nestling about her white brows and throwing gentle shadows into the gentler orbs beneath. She looks so young, so true, so loveable, that all hearts go out to her.

'She is the very sweetest thing in all this fair round world,' thinks her lover, as he watches her with fondly eager eyes from the other end of the table.

But a seed from grief's full pod falls everywhere ! To Sir Chicksy Chaucer alone is it permitted to present the inevitable contrast that is wanted to show off the fulness of the dominant joy. He does the part to perfection.

All through dinner he sits glowering upon space, with now and then a relaxation that enables him to fix upon Mr. Vyner, who happens to be seated next to Audrey, a most malevolent eye and a glance full of deadliest enmity. Vyner, in the course of time becoming aware of the eye and the enmity, is at first surprised by them and then intensely amused. Presently, however, growing tired of the little baronet's spasmodic glances, he turns to his companion.

'Well—are you satisfied ?' he asks, in a low tone, full of a half-contemptuous pleasantry. 'I have been hearing a good deal about you of late, and from what I have gleaned, your harvest is great—everybody has asked you to marry him—is it not ? Your scalps must be considerable.'

Audrey looks at him curiously for an instant, and then her lips widen into a smile curious as her glance.

'No, not everybody,' she answers, coolly, slightly mimicking his tone. 'So, you see, my cup of joy is not yet quite full.'

'How many yet remain to be undone ?'

'One.'

'And that one ?'

Miss Ponsonby lifts her straight brows and looks at him with audacious amusement in her glance.

'You !' she says, distinctly.

For a moment Vyner is disconcerted ; then, in spite of himself, he laughs out loud.

'Am I the defaulter ?'

'Yes, you alone of all, have forgotten to go down before my charms,' returns she, mockingly. She shrugs her shoulders, and turns from him as though to end the matter by entering into converse with her neighbour on the other side.

'My fault must be remedied,' exclaims Vyner, not hastily, but just in time to prevent her opening conversation with Bruno Bouverie. 'I would not have it said that your mission in life was a failure. Your roll-call should not be incomplete. Now—on the spot—let me make amends for my remissness. Miss Ponsonby, will you marry me ?'

He is still smiling, somewhat superciliously ; but his eyes are fixed on hers, and there is a strange gleam in them she has never seen there before. It puzzles her.



'Yes,' she returns, nonchalantly in answer to his question, whilst still studying the strangeness of his expression.

'You know what you have said?' asks he.

'Why should I not?'—calmly. 'You know what *you* said?'

'Beyond a doubt.'

She smiles again. But it is, for all that, clear to him that she has grown extraordinarily pale. She lets her eyes wander slowly from his, and now indeed gives her attention resolutely to Bruno, who has something to tell her of his mother, not being able to devote himself exclusively to Mrs. Wemyss, who is making herself charming to Sir Richard. Bruno might indeed at this moment have let himself grow a little jealous of the old baronet but for the sweet glances his hostess gives him every now and then, the sweeter for the fear that they may be intercepted.

Vyner slipping a ring from his little finger—a huge and almost priceless diamond that has been in his family for generations—lays it, under cover of the tablecloth, on Miss Ponsonby's lap. Starting a little, she looks first at it and then at him, with such open amazement in her eyes, that he is compelled to speak.

'You remember what you said,' he whispers, airily. 'Wear that and I will believe you.'

'Seeing is believing, you think? Well—which finger?' She looks at her ten pretty slender fingers as she says this. Then, as though she has forgotten him, the ring, and everything but her present thought, 'Do you know what Bruno has just told me?' she asks lightly.

'Never mind Bruno. We were talking of that ring. You will place it on your engaged finger, of course. It is the usual thing.'

'You are inexhaustible; you *will* see your farce out to its very end,' she says, smiling. Displacing one or two old-fashioned rings upon her left hand, she places his ring there instead.

Just at this moment one of the servants offers her an *entrée*. Leaning a little back to help herself, the diamond meets the light and flashes conspicuously.

'What a beautiful stone!' she says presently, when the man has passed on. 'Beautiful enough to be remarkable. Every one will see it.'

'If you *meant* that "Yes" of a while since, what need that matter?'

‘And if I did not?’

‘Why, then I shall be even a greater fool than all the others that have gone before me. A sorry reflection! Must it be mine?’

‘You see,’ returns she, thoughtfully, ‘that is a word that could never be applied to *you*.’

‘You can be kind when you like, it seems.’

‘And unkind too. Women, they say, have a passion for diamonds; perhaps this one of yours has softened me—momentarily. Now take it back. See, it is too large for me; I am afraid I shall lose it!’

‘It would be lost in a good cause; and I certainly shan’t take it back.’

‘Will you take the consequences then instead? Some exchange is due to you.’

‘Yes. I’ll take the consequences.’

‘It is a bargain?’

‘Certainly.’

‘I think I’ve the best of it,’ says Miss Ponsonby, laughing.

‘I’m so very glad you think so,’ returns Vyner, with some emphasis.

Gradually, in spite of the butler, dinner draws to a close, and the men rising with the women, they all soon find themselves in the drawing-room. The windows are thrown wide open, and through them rushes the balmy wind and the first clear streaks of moonlight.

‘What a lovely night! Shall we go and see how the gardens are looking?’ asks Mrs. Wemyss. ‘Sir Chicksy’—addressing that woebegone youth with considerable *empressement*—‘will you come out with me? Do; I am sure you have a bad headache, and the cool night-wind will do you a world of good.’

Sir Chicksy, who by this time is awfully far gone in melancholia, says never a word; grief has laid too heavy a hand upon him to permit of careless speech; but he follows her obediently down the stone steps of the balcony and across the grass to where the gravel walk checks them. Here he strikes an attitude suggestive of despair and smites his breast with an impartial hand.

‘It wasn’t a headache,’ he says at last, just as she begins to grow frightened—‘it was—*her*!’

‘Who?’ demands Mrs. Wemyss, not because she doesn’t know, but because she wants to gain time.

'Audrey,' returns he, in a ghastly tone. 'You mark my words,' cries this wretched young man, very feebly; 'she will be the death of me! I know it! I feel it here!'—striking with a clenched hand his unoffending forehead, which sends out, as if in answer to him, a hollow reverberation. 'Remember my words when I shall be no more!' he whispers, wildly. 'My death will lie at her door; something within me tells me so.'

Again he strikes his manly brow, and looks as though he were going to call upon all the gods of Olympus to witness his sufferings and his secret convictions.

'Nonsense! Never mind your brains,' says Mrs. Wemyss, coolly and very sensibly; 'no doubt they are telling you something utterly absurd. Forget them, and confide in me this thing that is distressing you.'

'You see before you a blighted being!' declares the love-lorn baronet, running his fingers through his pallid locks until they stand straight upright on his head and give him the appearance of being a little even farther gone than usual upon the road that leads to the nearest asylum for lunatics. 'For me life no longer possesses a charm. The grave—the grave alone I sigh for.'

'But why sigh at all?' asks Mrs. Wemyss, comfortably. 'And as for the grave, my dear Sir Chicksy, take my word for it, you'd find it a most unpleasant place. It is all very well to abuse the world; but a coffin is an odious thing when one comes to think of it.'

'I would I were lying in mine!' protests he in a hollow tone. 'What is life without love? A mockery, a delusion, and a snare!'

'Are you going to tell me what is the matter with you?' demands Mrs. Wemyss, just one little note of sharpness in her soft voice. 'Who shall blame her? You will feel any amount better if you will just get it off your mind, whatever it is.'

'I've told you. It's Audrey,' says the woeful knight, sighing deeply. 'I took your advice and proposed to her again. It was the seventh time! I said to myself, "This is the mystic number; now I shall succeed; soon I shall call my love my own!" With high hope and a beating heart, I approached her footstool. I knelt to her. At her feet I poured out all my soul, I laid bare my innermost thoughts. She heard me; she listened—yea, to the very end; and then——'

He pauses, as though overpowered by his feelings

'Well?'—eagerly.

'She sort of told me—to *get out*,' winds up Sir Chicksy, somewhat inefficiently, and with a dolorous snuffle; 'she would *none* of me! She wouldn't hear of me as a husband at any price! She wouldn't so much as look at me!'

Here he falls a-weeping.

'Don't do that!' exclaims Mrs. Wemyss, indignantly. 'It's—it's abominable of you! Haven't you any self-respect?'

'Not a particle!' declares he, still crying noisily. 'Why should I? What good would it do me? All my hopes are "dear departeds"; there's nothing left to me! I'd as soon be dead as alive!'

'Or sooner, perhaps,' suggests she, with a suspicion of a smile, speedily checked. 'But why give in at only a seventh repulse? Try it again!'

'She wouldn't stand it; she as much as told me so. Even as I knelt before her that last time, she said, coldly as a beautiful sorceress, "If ever you even *hint* at this hateful nonsense again, I'll turn you out of the house!" "Hateful"—that was the word that she used towards my devoted affection, I give you my honour,' says Sir Chicksy, beginning to weep afresh. 'Now, what d'ye call that?'

'Barbarity,' decides Mrs. Wemyss, promptly, who is, however, consumed with a desire for laughter. 'I wonder you don't abuse her like a pickpocket. Oh, what a senseless girl, to be blind to such charms as yours!'

'Couldn't you say a word for me,' entreats Sir Chicksy, miserably, taking her hand and pressing it convulsively. 'Do, do! oh, *do*!' He is gazing up at her in the misty moonlight, his eyes swimming with grief. His fingers have played such havoc with his head by this time, that he looks for all the world like the 'fretful porcupine,' as he stands, miserably dishevelled, waiting for her answer.

How silver sweet sound lovers' tongues by night,  
Like softest music to attending ears!

breathes Mrs. Wemyss, half as a safety-valve to her suppressed mirth, half with the hope of gaining time. 'Dear Sir Chicksy, you know I am always your friend. I will do what I can.'

This is hardly hypocrisy on her part, as she has indeed many a time and oft dropped hints about Sir Chicksy's wealth and position to the irresponsive Audrey.

'Ah, but *what* will you do?' demands he anxiously, who is perhaps only half such a fool as he looks.

Whilst Mrs. Wemyss hesitates as to what proper answer she shall make to this pertinent question, the sound of an advancing footstep comes to her aid.

'Another time you must discuss this matter with me,' she breathes, confidentially, gathering up her long train, as though to emphasise the fact that departure from the spot on which they stand is imperative. 'Another time, and soon! Till then—Somebody is coming,' she says, quickly—'you *hear*? This spot is growing too popularised for confidences. Adieu, then, until fortune favours us again!'

She glides away from him, and is soon lost to sight among the encircling foliage. Sir Chicksy is about to follow her example and disappear in another direction, when a solitary figure stepping out upon the balcony attracts his attention.

It is Audrey! Approaching the iron rails that bound the balcony, she leans upon them, and gazes down upon the semi-darkness below, where Mr. Vyner is walking up and down smoking a cigar.

'Mr. Vyner!' calls she, softly.

Hearing her, Vyner comes to a standstill beneath the balcony, and looks up at her, cigar in hand.

'Here, catch!' she whispers, lowering to him a beautiful arm, white as snow, that gleams in the moonlight and has a little hand at the end of it, holding something tightly clenched.

'Are you going to throw me something?' asks he, carelessly. 'If so—don't. I could not see it.'

'Join your hands, then, and hold them out; you will surely see this.'

'That's where your intellect fails you. I can see nothing. It is quite an Egyptian darkness down here. Are you going to make me a present? If you think it is my birthday,' says Mr. Vyner, slowly and with an honourable effort, 'I feel it only honest to let you know that my natal day is not now—it comes with the snow and the sleet; still, if you are bent on giving me something handsome, why, come down and do it.'

Slowly, daintily, Audrey descends the stone steps to meet him awaiting her upon the grass beneath.

'Take it!' she says, extending her hand to him palm uppermost, on which his ring is lying.

'Why, that is yours!' returns he.

A vehement gesture, expressive of anger, escapes her.

'Take it!' she says again, with an impatience that is almost fierce.

'I can't, indeed!' declares he, calmly, flinging his cigar far from him. 'It is quite out of the question. Why, it is hardly an hour ago since you accepted, not only it, but *me*. I fear you will have to keep us both.'

She pales very perceptibly beneath his steady glance, but her gaze refuses to falter. Her dark eyes look at him out of her colourless face with a strange but unvarying light that is perhaps even a little contemptuous.

'A jest prolonged is but a poor thing,' she murmurs, with a flickering smile that has no mirth in it.

'There I agree with you; though I confess I cannot see where the jest comes in here. I have your word, the word that gave you to me, and I intend keeping you to it, whether you will or whether you won't.' Then his whole manner changes, an inexpressible tenderness alters and characterises it. 'You *did* mean what you said?' he asks, very gently, almost beseechingly.

No answer coming to him, he lays his hands with a certain suddenness upon her shoulders, and turns her slight figure to where the moonbeams can fall upon it, with a closer scrutiny.

'Speak!' he says. It is possible that in his anxiety he may have given her a gentle shake. She does not resent it, but her eyes fill with tears.

'Ah,' exclaims Vyner, 'even though you refuse to accept me, still I tell you you are mine. I will give you up to no man on earth.' He leans a little forward, still with his hands upon her shoulders, as if keeping her in custody. 'Now I am going to kiss *my wife*,' he declares with determination.

Audrey laying her five little outspread fingers upon his chest, presses him from her. Her face is ashen white, her lips quivering.

'Anthony, what is it you mean?' she whispers, in a voice so changed by tremulous agitation as to be a breath rather than a voice.

'That I love you,' replies Vyner, earnestly; 'you must have known it, and that you love me too, though not perhaps so deeply as I love you; still, I dare to believe that I am better in your eyes than any other man.'

He encircles her with his arms and draws her towards him—she unresisting. There is a long pause, fraught with many thoughts; and then she lays her head upon his breast.

'At last, *at last* I am happy!' she whispers, a little wildly, and bursts into a passion of tears.

\* \* \* \* \*

Half an hour has gone by, giving time to a very stricken young man to steal away and lose himself, but not his indignant misery, among the laurels and the rhododendrons in the shrubbery, and still Audrey and Vyner are standing in a very lover-like attitude, forgetful of time, forgetful of everything but he of her and she of him, when a sudden rustle of draperies, a faint footfall, rouses them from their fairy-dream and warns them of impending danger.

With a sense of guilt, they start hastily apart and glance in the direction of the coming sound.

And now a pretty daintily-clad form is discernible through the moonlit gloom. It is Mrs. Wemyss—of that they are at once aware—her somewhat bizarre costume rendering her very conspicuous upon the gravelled pathway.

'It might have been worse,' says Vyner, pressing Audrey's hand reassuringly.

That Mrs. Wemyss has seen them is manifest by the very way in which she comes to a standstill and wavers openly as to whether she shall or shall not swoop down upon them. She makes a step towards them, then pauses, and finally—like all those who hesitate—she is lost, and turning away from them, commences a hasty retreat.

'Let us intercept her,' whispers Vyner; and, still holding Audrey's hand, he hurries after the departing figure of their hostess.

'As you witnessed the first act, you might have done us the honour to wait for the last,' he says, reproachfully, as they come up with her.

'But how then?' demands Mrs. Wemyss, flinging out her hands and laughing gaily. 'How could I? You see I had forgotten to ask the bishop to dinner.'

At this merry retort they all laugh.

'I knew how it would be,' declares Mrs. Wemyss, presently, looking whole volumes of congratulation at them both. 'I could have told you all about it months ago. I am so glad about it!' She kisses Audrey with sincere warmth, and Audrey kisses her back again with an *abandon* she would have been incapable of a week ago.

'It wasn't Bruno, after all, you see!' says Vyner, mischievously. 'It was I!'

'So I see. Well, I'm delighted! Though what I'm to say to that melancholy Sir Chicksy, after the encouragement I have given him only this very night, I don't know.'

Then she smiles again, and points towards the gardens.

'It is too early to waste time on outsiders,' she goes on, regarding the lovers with sympathetic eyes. 'Don't do it. Go into the garden; you will find a seat there somewhere, and a very marvel of a moon rioting madly among my stately holly-hocks.'

They are not slow to take her hint; and scarcely have they disappeared, when Bruno comes upon the scene from behind a protective hedge.

'Whom were you talking to?' asks he, drawing near. 'I heard voices as I came along, on a wild-geese chase for you which has lasted for a mortal hour. Have I driven my rival away?' He looks, in spite of a careful self-suppression, very decidedly inclined towards jealousy.

'I was listening to a charming confidence,' laughs Mrs. Wemyss, gaily, who is too anxious to reveal her news to stay to indulge in coquetry. 'Audrey and Anthony Vyner have been with me; and—guess—'

'You saved them from annihilating each other like the Kilkenny cats; is that it?'

'Wrong, O Thersites! On the contrary, they came to me as cooing doves might come, to tell me that they are engaged to be married.'

'What? Why I thought they hated each other!'

'There are so many kinds of hatred. You will remember perhaps that extremes meet. So that, if one hates a person very, *very* VERY much, why, in time they will get to the other end of it, where the adoring begins, and will wind up by loving each other very, *very*, VERY much.'

'Would they?' says Bruno. 'Then I wish with all my heart that you hated me "very, *very*, VERY much."'

'There is something in the air, isn't there?' asks Mrs. Wemyss, reflectively, ignoring his remark—'something magnetic that suggests love? At least one might reasonably suppose so, as everybody seems to be proposing marriage to everybody else to-night. I wish somebody would ask me to marry him. I feel a little out in the cold.'

'You needn't. On an average, I think I have been proposing to you morning, noon, and night for the past six months.'



'Well, but you haven't to-night,' says Mrs. Wemyss, carefully.

'The night is very far from being spent yet, and such an accusation shall not be cast in my teeth. I'll do it now again, or die! Would you prefer a declaration standing or kneeling?'

'You have so often done it both ways that——'

'That it must be easy to decide?'

'No, difficult. If there were only a third way, it might contain a charm. But one grows weary——'

'Of saying "No"?—quickly. 'Say "Yes," then, for a change.'

'Oh, impossible!—laughing, blushing, and warding off her lover as he draws closer to her by holding up to him two pretty pink palms extended. 'If I said "Yes" now, I should always think it was I who had proposed to *you*. And, besides, you should marry some pretty little girl, ever so much younger than you. As for me, I am nobody.'

'You are all the world to *me*, at all events; don't make it a wilderness to me.' A certain moment elapses in which he has defied the resisting hands and drawn her to his heart. 'Say you will marry me, Cis,' desires he, in a somewhat masterful tone.

'I shall pay you off for this later on,' whispers she, with a soft laugh. 'But, if you will have it so—why, then, Yes!'

'You mean it?' asks Bruno, tightening his grasp.

'I mean that I have been most shamefully coerced,' returns she, smiling. 'But yet——'

'What, darling?'

'I am *glad* of the coercion!'

\* \* \* \* \*

Drowsy night grows on the world,

the heavens become more fair by reason of the increase of their starry gems, the earth beneath is full of the reflex of their glory. Under the rays of the great moon, Dick and his soul's desire are pacing to and fro upon a secluded pathway hedged in by flowering myrtles and the scented boughs of the pale walnut-trees.

Dolores, with head thrown back against her lover's breast, is musing thoughtfully on many happy things that are, on many sorrowful things that yet have been; but no grief dwells upon her gentle face, no shadow dims its brightness. The

purity of her soft lips and eyes is unmarred by cankering **care**. Hope is her guest to-night. Hope and the knowledge of a great love that, with fair face and sweet, has stolen into her inmost heart and made an everlasting lodging there.

Dick is her own again, her love, her dearest heart ! His care will be as a girdle round her always. She will be his, to have and to hold for ever, to guard, to cherish, to keep back from her the very winds of heaven, lest they smite her too severely.

A glad smile full of beauty overspreads her face as thus her thoughts wander into regions replete with joy. No memory of her late misery stirs her soul. All trouble is forgotten, all unquiet recollections laid in their sullen grave. Who remembers the night when the morning dawns ? Past griefs grow dim when present joys abound.

A long sweet sigh escapes her, a sigh of the very deepest content. She lifts her eyes to her lover only to find his gaze riveted upon her in the clear languorous moonlight.

'Of what are you thinking, darling ? Of me ?' asks he, in a low tone.

'For once, no,' confesses Dolores, smiling and rubbing her cheek softly against his. 'Of some one far less dear, yet who still has a claim upon my affection. I was thinking of Mrs. Burnet.'

'Ah, that good woman !'

'I was recalling to my mind how she looked this morning, when I gave her the money that will enable her daughter to leave service and marry the man she loves. Such a heavenly delight showed itself upon her face, such joy, such gratitude ; it was almost too much ; it made me cry.'

Tears are standing within her loving eyes, but there is a smile upon her lips.

'Ah,' cries she, 'I am so happy myself that I would, if it were possible, see all true lovers happy also ! And that poor mother's glance of joy is a thing never to be forgotten. Yes'—with a little sigh of the intensest satisfaction—'I have certainly succeeded in making some one truly glad to-day !'

'To-day's success makes two. Do I not count with you ? Have you not made me happy ?'

He receives his answer, not in words, but in a tender deed.

'I never think of you, you are myself,' she whispers presently. 'And, besides, in such a matter as this we are quits.'

I could give you no larger share of bliss than you have given me.'

'Beloved, does no cruel memory of the sad past days torment you now?' asks he, regarding her with fond anxious eyes. 'You feel nothing?'

'Nothing,' returns she, dreamily. She steals her arms round his neck, and lays her head upon his breast, and for a while is very silent. Then—

'I feel only this,' she says at last, as though she has been revolving his question in her mind—'that I am with you now, and shall be so for ever, and that I am at rest, and very, *very* thankful.'

There is a pause for a long while; but they, standing thus together, feeling the beating of each other's hearts, take no heed of the rapidity of time. She is in his arms, the one thing precious to him, a possession before which all the choicest glories of the world pall.

'You are growing stronger—your old pretty colour is coming back to you,' he says, presently, regarding her with a most thankful criticism. 'You *feel* better?' with lover-like anxiety.

'I am altogether well,' returns she, smiling; 'body and soul are free from pain. Peace alone belongs to me. You need not be frightened about me any longer, Dick'—lifting her beautiful laughing eyes to his. 'Only yesterday Mrs. Edgeworth told me she hoped I would not grow *too* robust, as stoutness was a terrible fault in a young lady.'

They both laugh.

'Dear old thing,' goes on Dolores. 'I am so glad she is still papa's housekeeper. She told me she was a little uneasy at first when the great change was made, lest she should not be considered "grand enough" for the situation. But I soon set her mind at rest about that.'

'You would have everybody's mind at rest if you had your way,' says Dick, caressingly. 'Do you remember how I used, in the old days, to compare you to a white violet?'

'I remember.'

'I was wrong, I think; I have'—looking at her very tenderly—'a better comparison for you now; you are more like a spring daisy—so fair, so white, so delicate, with such a heart of *gold*!'

She glances up at him with parted lips and eyes alight with love. His arms tighten round her slender form; his eyes meet hers—

Far, far above them the floating moon glides on, and through the idle trees a wooing breeze comes quickly, playing with her sunny hair and kissing her perfect mouth. The air is full of mystic sounds ; from the forest below the sad belling of a straying deer may be heard, and to the lovers there comes across the dew-bespangled sward the voice of one calling—

‘Dolores, Dolores ! Come in, my darling !’

It is the voice of Miss Maturin, and it reaches them fraught with fond love and keenest anxiety.

‘Yes, yes ; we must go in indeed,’ says Dolores. ‘A pity, too !’ she sighs, with a lingering glance cast into the dark sweetness of the autumn night. ‘Good-night to you, dear stars !’ she cries, with a little childish wave of her slender fingers towards the heavens. ‘A fair good-night to all this lovely world !’

Still for a moment she lingers, smiling a soft adieu, then slips her hand within her lover’s arm, and goes with him across the flowering grasses.

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